

HISTORY OF EUROPE

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HISTORY OF EUROPE

FROM THE

FALL OF NAPOLEON.

IN MDCCCXV

TO THE

ACCESSION OF LOUIS NAPOLEON

IN MDCCCLII

BY

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Revolution, in 1789, to the Battle of Waterloo," &c. &c.

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CHAPTER XLL.

ENGLAND FROM THE ACCESSION OF SIR R. PEEL TO POWER
IN NOVEMBER 1841, TO THE PASSING OF THE BANK CHARTER
ACT IN JUNE 1844.

SIR ROBERT PEEL, who was now, by a concurrence of parties, and the experienced weakness of former governments, again elevated by a decisive majority to power, was one of those men who have been so variously painted by their contemporaries, and so differently mirrored by their actions, that their real character will for ever remain a perplexing enigma to future ages. All public men, whose deeds have left a permanent impress on the surface of public affairs, are of course represented in opposite colours by party writers of opposite principles ; and it is generally from a comparison of both, as from the conflicting evidence in a criminal trial, that the verdict of posterity is formed. But in Sir R. Peel's case this ordinary difficulty is enhanced by the singular circumstance that he has been variously represented, not only by writers of different parties, but by writers of the same party at different times. In the early period of his career he was the chosen champion of the Church and High Tory principles, and in a similar degree the object of obloquy to the Whigs : in his late years he

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1.

Character
of Sir R.
Peel, so
variously
represented.

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was a still greater object of laudation to the Liberals and vituperation to the Conservatives. It is difficult to say whether, prior to 1829, the "bigot Peel" was more vehemently denounced by the Irish Catholics and English Liberals, than the "apostate Peel" was, after 1846, by his early friends and supporters; while the blame of this latter party has been since that time almost drowned in the loud and impassioned applause of the ruling Liberal majority in the State.

2.
Causes of
this diver-
sity.

No one need be told to what this singular and almost unprecedented change of opinion, in both the parties which divide the country, has been owing. Sir R. Peel, at different times of his life, was not only actuated by *opposite principles*, but he was a different man. The steady, uncompromising opponent of Catholic claims became their most decided and successful supporter; the resolute enemy of free trade in corn turned into its unqualified advocate; and on both occasions he exerted the powers with which he had been intrusted by those hostile to the alteration to insure its unqualified adoption. Changes so prodigious occurring in one so highly gifted, and wielding, in a manner, the whole political power in the State, excited more than the ordinary amount of political enmity and antagonism; they engendered a feeling of disappointed expectation, and awakened the pangs of betrayed affection. Confidence not only in him, but in all public men of the age, was shaken by so flagrant a deviation from declared principles; and all parties—even those most benefited by the sudden and unexpected conversion—concurred in the melancholy conclusion, that the time was past when consistency of political conduct was to be expected in public men; that frequency of change had produced its usual effect in destroying fixity of purpose; and that we had fallen into such days as those when a Marlborough was elevated to the height of greatness by betraying one sovereign, and Ney suffered the death of a traitor for attempting to betray another.

It is not surprising, when the circumstances of these two memorable conversions are considered, that feelings of this warm and impassioned kind should have arisen in the party which, twice over, saw their most cherished system of policy overturned by their chosen champion ; but a calm consideration of the case must, in justice to Sir R. Peel, very materially modify these opinions. The analogy seems at first sight just between a political chief altering his policy in government, and a general betraying his sovereign in the field of battle ; but in reality it is not so. There is no parallelism between the situation of a soldier and a statesman. Fidelity to king and country will admit of no equivocation ; but adherence, under changing circumstances, to preconceived opinions, so far from being always a political virtue, may often be the greatest political fault, for it may lead to public ruin. Prince Polignac was quite consistent through life, and, as such, he must command the respect of every honourable mind ; but what did his consistency lead to ? A great general is not he who always takes the same position, but he who, in all circumstances, takes the position most likely to be attended at the time with success. In this world of change, and in an age pre-eminently distinguished by it, undeviating adherence to expressed thought is *impossible* in a statesman ; for his power being built on opinion, he must go with that opinion, or it will be immediately shattered. Consistency of opinion may be expected in an author who treats of past events, or a philosopher who discourses on their tendencies, for they address themselves to future ages, when the immutable laws of nature will be seen to have been unceasingly acting in the mighty maze ; but a statesman, who must act on the present, can only wield power by means of the multitude, and to do so with effect he must often share their versatility. Mr Pitt and Mr Burke themselves changed : the former was at first a parliamentary reformer ; the latter, in early life, a strenuous supporter

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3.

Injustice of
these ex-
treme opi-
nions on
both sides.

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of revolution in America. The real reproach against Sir R. Peel is, not that he changed his views, but that he made use of power conferred by one party to carry through the objects of their opponents ; a course which, however it may be attended with success, it will be no easy matter for his warmest panegyrists to defend.

4.
He did not
want poli-
tical cour-
age.

It is commonly said, in explanation of this tendency to change, which formed so remarkable a feature in his character, that Sir R. Peel, though personally brave, was politically timid ; that he entertained a nervous dread of revolution, and that the moment he saw a course of policy was likely to be attended with danger, he relinquished it, and passed over with all his forces to the victorious side. There can be no doubt that at first sight this seems a very plausible theory to explain the phenomenon. But a closer examination of his political career will show that it too is erroneous, and that a want of moral courage can by no means be justly imputed as a failing to Sir R. Peel. On the contrary, he frequently exhibited firmness and resolution in the very highest degree, both in external and internal affairs. Witness his noble conduct on learning the Affghanistan disaster in 1841, which, after a calamity unparalleled since the destruction of the legions of Varus, again chained victory to the British standards in India, and his intrepid self-sacrifice to what he deemed the good of his country in the emancipation of the Catholics in 1829. Even his crowning act of self-immolation, when he repealed the Corn Laws, in opposition to the tenor of an entire lifetime, in 1846, was anything but an indication of political weakness. To a man of his sensitive temperament, and so passionately desirous of preserving the lead of the noble party he had so long headed in the House of Commons, the averted eye, the unreturned pressure of the hand, were more terrible than the most signal political defeat ; and the ambition of a lifetime was more thoroughly sacrificed by a change which necessarily

alienated the warmest friends, than if he had been consigned, like Strafford, to the dungeon and the scaffold. But he felt, doubtless, a yet nobler ambition than that of leading a party or ruling an empire. His feeling was—

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"Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read his hist'ry in a nation's eyes."

Sir Robert Peel was not a man of original genius or inventive thought: there is not a singular *idée mère* can be traced to him through his whole career. "Register, register, register," was not his own, he borrowed it from a celebrated political journal, generally in opposition to himself, where it is to be found years before he ever gave utterance to the counsel.* His mind was adoptive, not creative: he was the mirror of the age, not its director: his leading ideas and principles were taken from others. In monetary affairs he only elaborated the ideas of Mr Horner and Mr Ricardo, first enunciated in the Bullion Report. In supporting the Corn Laws he adopted the arguments of Lord Liverpool and Lord Castlereagh; in assailing them, those of Mr Bright and Mr Cobden. It was the same with Catholic Emancipation: his arguments, admirable on both sides, were alternately adopted from those of Lord Liverpool and Mr Perceval, of Mr Canning and Mr Plunkett. It was this which suggested to Mr

5.
He had
no original
genius, and
was not a
leader of
thought.

* "A considerable proportion of the present voters are, from their occupations and habits, democratical, and will ever continue so. They must be *out-voted*, or the constitution is lost. The mode in which this must be done is obvious; and it is here that the persevering efforts of property can best overcome the prodigious ascendancy which the Reform Bill, in the outset, gave to the reckless and destitute classes of the community. IT IS IN THE REGISTRATION COURTS THAT THE BATTLE OF THE CONSTITUTION IS TO BE FOUGHT AND WON. It is by a continued, persevering, and skilful exertion there that education, worth, and property may regain their ascendancy over anarchy, vice, and democracy. By a proper organisation in this way, it is astonishing what may be done. It is thus, and thus only, that the balance of society can be restored in these islands."—*Blackwood's Magazine*, 1st May 1835, vol. xxxvii. p. 813. The capitals are in the original. Sir R. Peel's speeches to the same effect were in 1837 and 1838.

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Disraeli the felicitous expression, that his mind was a "huge appropriation clause"—a phrase which so perfectly expressed the truth that it became a household word in every part of Great Britain. But this very absence of a creative mind, or original thought, only rendered him more powerful and successful as a statesman, whose influence and success in a constitutional monarchy must always be built upon his measures falling in with the opinions of the majority. These opinions are generally formed upon the great of a former generation, not the present; and therefore nothing is, in a popular community, so fatal to the present power of a statesman, whatever it may be to his future fame, as conceiving or acting upon original ideas. But though not gifted with a creative mind, he was second to none in the readiness with which he embraced, the force with which he worked out, and the ability with which he enforced, the arguments of others. His industry was indefatigable, his powers of research vast, and his faculty of bringing an immense mass of facts to bear upon a particular view, unrivalled even in the days of Huskisson. He had a prodigious acquaintance with all the principal branches of our trade and manufactures, and was often able to correct the statements or inform the ignorance of the very persons practically engaged in them. Like all men of a capacious and powerful mind, he was *gifted with a singularly retentive memory*, and could bring out at will figures and details on subjects which for long had not been under discussion, to the no small annoyance of his opponents, who were rarely endowed with the same power of commanding details, and bringing them forth on the proper occasion. Hansard's Debates were familiar to him, and great was the success with which he often turned against his opponents that provoking record of the past. These, if not the highest qualities in a debater, were perhaps the most serviceable in the reformed House of Commons, composed for the most part of practical men who had worked their way to the lead

in the large constituencies, and who were less liable to be influenced by bursts of eloquence or the flowers of rhetoric than by a simple business-like statement of facts connected with, or material to, the leading interests which their constituencies expected them to support.

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His style of eloquence was of a high, but not of the highest kind. His speeches were always full of matter, his command of figures immense, and the correctness of his statements of facts such that his most inveterate opponent was never able to detect him in an error. He was more successful, however, in stating his own case than in refuting that of his opponents: he seldom met an argument fairly: he rarely tried to refute, often to ridicule his opponent. It was well said of him by an accomplished parliamentary antagonist, that he drove an excellent pair, but rarely put on four horses. He was an accomplished scholar, and was first brought into notice by taking the highest degrees at Oxford both in classics and mathematics. But though he retained through life a strong partiality for the studies of his youth, and often made a happy use of classical allusions and quotations in Parliament, his mind was not sufficiently ardent, his genius not sufficiently glowing, to inspire him with the vehement feelings which are the soul of the highest style of eloquence. "Thoughts that breathe and words that burn" seldom occurred to his calm and practical mind. He was an admirable debater; and, from his thorough command of every subject to which he applied his powers, he never failed to rouse the attention of his hearers, and acquired at length the command, to an extraordinary extent, of the House of Commons. But though always sagacious and weighty in the arguments he adduced, he had none of the earnestness which springs from strong internal conviction, and still less of that, the highest of all, which flows from originality or fire of conception.

6.
His style of
oratory.

His name is so indissolubly connected with the two great changes which he was mainly instrumental in effecting, that his merits in an inferior department of the public

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7.

His administrative
powers.

service are in a great measure forgotten. But in the domestic administration of the empire his merits were of the very highest kind. As Home Secretary, during the many years he held that important office, his conduct was in the truest sense upright and meritorious. Patient and laborious, conscientious in the conception of duty, and unwearied in its discharge, he was always at his post, and devoted the powers of an active and vigorous mind to the investigation of the numerous matters of public and private interest which were then submitted to his consideration. He took upon himself the duty of both counsel and judge in the melancholy cases then unhappily so frequent, when the life of a criminal was referred to the mercy of the Crown and the decision of the Home Secretary. The improvements he introduced into the Irish police were so great that he may be said to have been its founder; and it was under his direction that it became what it now is, one of the finest bodies of men, and beyond all question the finest civil force that exists in the world. The metropolis owes to him the admirable mounted and foot police to which its tranquillity and safety in recent times have been so much indebted. Nor were his exertions confined merely to administrative ameliorations. In the modification of *our criminal code* he eagerly adopted, and judiciously carried into practice, the views of *Romilly and Mackintosh*; and it is owing to his efforts, in a great degree, that the severity of the penal law has been so much modified that, for above ten years, no man has been executed in Great Britain save for wilful and cold-blooded murder. Happy would it have been if his sagacious and practical mind had been turned with equal earnestness to the great questions of secondary punishments, and the removal of the difficulties with which the practical operation of the only effectual one—transportation—has come to be surrounded!

One great and lasting benefit has been conferred by Sir Robert Peel on his country, which even the strongest of his opponents will, at this distance of time, be willing to

admit. This was the glorious stand he made against the flood of revolution when the Reform Bill was under discussion, and during the years which immediately followed its adoption. That the Whig leaders were then as much alarmed as the Conservatives at the strength of the passion which they had evoked in the country, is evident from Lord Brougham's words, that, in dissolving Parliament in April 1831, they felt as if they were spanning a fiery gulf on a rib of steel, and the undoubted fact that Earl Grey was precipitated from power in 1834, because, after the bill was passed, he set himself to oppose the ulterior designs of his extreme supporters. But had it not been for the steadiness, courage, and ability with which, during those critical years, Sir Robert Peel conducted the Opposition, it is more than probable that all Earl Grey's efforts to moderate the storm would have been unavailing, and that 1832 would have been to England what 1789 had been to France. It was owing to the extreme wisdom and ability of his conduct on that occasion that the most precious of all objects in withstanding a movement,—time,—was gained, and that, before irrevocable changes had been made, the nation had in some degree recovered from its delusions, and the passion for organic change had been sobered down into the safer desire for practical ameliorations. And though he failed in retaining power when it was conferred upon him in 1835, yet his administration, short as it was, was attended with the most important effects; for it increased the Opposition in the House of Commons from 100 to 300, again raised the House of Lords from the dust to its legitimate functions, and, after a rude shock, restored the constitution in some degree to its former equilibrium.

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8.

Great merit
of his oppo-
sition to
Reform.

The anomalies in Sir Robert Peel's political career have been so extraordinary, that many have sought an explanation of them in the supposition that he was throughout life actuated by an excessive ambition, nourished early in life by his father, who laid out for him

9.

Ambition
was not the
cause of his
versatility
of principle.

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from the first the situation of prime-minister, and increased subsequently by his extraordinary and long-continued sway in the House of Commons. This it was, it is said, which led to his change of principle : he could not endure the monotony of a private station, and when no other means of grasping or retaining power remained, he sought to effect it by a sacrifice of consistency. An attentive consideration of his career, however, must convince every impartial person that this is by no means the true solution of the difficulty. On the contrary, had he been actuated by personal feelings or political ambition, his conduct on the most important occasions of his life would have been the reverse of what it actually was. Had he chosen to bid for popularity, instead of sacrificing it by opposing Reform, he would have been carried forward to power on the shoulders of the people, and attained a position, in 1833, as commanding as the great commoner who, in the middle of the preceding century, supplanted the effete Whig aristocracy. His matchless skill in discerning the signs of the times, and observing the tendencies of the House of Commons, told him, from the first, that he was not paving, but barring the road to power, by his unexpected conversions in 1829 and 1846. He said, with truth, in his posthumous memoirs, that if he had been actuated by the love of power, not the love of his country, he would have either retained the permanent lead of one party, by steadily adhering to its principles, or acquired the direction of the other, by frankly adopting its views, and not sacrificed both by a conduct which secured to him the confidence of neither.

10.
Real explanation
of
his conduct.

The truth appears to be, that he was throughout, and in all his changes, actuated by a sincere and disinterested desire for the good of his country ; but that one unhappy mistake, into which he had been led, in the outset of his career, by his adoption of the views of others, rendered him, on the most momentous occasions, either blind to what that good really was, or timorous in asserting his

own views regarding it. Without the advantages of ancient descent or aristocratic connections, and the son of one who had been the architect of his own fortune, he was naturally inclined to regard with favour that mercantile interest to which his greatness had been owing. It would be going too far to assert, as Gibbon did of Mr Fox, that "his inmost soul was tinged with democracy;" for no man was inspired from principle with a more profound respect for the civil institutions of his country. But this was the conviction of reason, it was not the bent of inclination. It is certain that, from early youth, he was inclined to Liberal opinions, and that it was a knowledge of that which induced his father, who was a stanch Tory of the old school, to throw him so early into public life, in hopes that, when in harness, he would wax warm in the contest on his own side.* This tendency, unavoidable in one situated as he was, was unfortunately greatly increased by his early connection with the rising school of the political economists, whose opinions on the all-important matter of monetary policy had been recorded in the memorable Bullion Report of 1810. The leaders of this school, Mr Horner and Mr Ricardo, obtained on these subjects the entire direction of his mind; and it is to their influence that the parts of his career which otherwise would seem inexplicable are chiefly to be ascribed. For good or for evil, they stamped their impress upon his mind; and his subsequent career bore indelible marks of their influence.

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* "Une anecdote que je tiens de bonne source donnerait lieu de penser qu'il était, depuis longtemps et par nature, placé sur la pente à laquelle il céda, quand de conservateur obstiné il devint ardent réformateur. On dit qu'en 1809, lorsqu'il entra dans la Chambre des Communes, son père, le vieux Sir R. Peel, alla trouver Lord Liverpool, et lui dit : ' Mon fils est, soyez-en sûr, un jeune homme doué de talens rares, et qui jouera un rôle important. Mais je le connais bien ; au fond, ses penchans sont Whigs ; si nous ne l'engageons pas promptement dans nos rangs, il nous échappera. Mettez-le dans les affaires ; il vous servira bien ; mais il faut sans tarder vous emparer de lui.' Lord Liverpool observa le fils, reconnut son mérite, et suivit le conseil du père."—GUIZOT, *Sir R. Peel*, p. 342.

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11.

His views
on the Cur-
rency.

He had been nominated chairman of the Bullion Committee of 1819 by Lord Liverpool, to form a check upon the extreme views of Mr Ricardo and the Economists ; but he soon was either convinced by their arguments, or fell a prey to their seductions. He disdained lucre for himself or his relations, but he worshipped it with devout devotion for his country. He thought the country never could be in danger when its monetary state was sound, and that that depended entirely on the retention of gold by the Bank of England. He measured the public strength by the number of sovereigns in its vaults; private influence in a great degree by the magnitude of balances with bankers. In gold he saw the only solid and imperishable condensation of wealth, in realised capital the only secure foundation for future progress or accumulation. He never could believe that the nation was other than prosperous if the Bank had fifteen millions' worth of gold in its coffers. *He deemed every attempt to create or augment wealth hazardous and delusive which was not based upon the interest of its monied capital, every measure expedient which went to augment the solid metallic treasures of the nation. To that unhappy conviction the most fatal errors of his career may be distinctly traced. He lived in the perpetual dread of the nation being broken down, and public ruin induced, either by the draining away the gold, which would starve industry, or by the issue of assignats to supply their place, which would extinguish capital. The memory of 1825, when the bullion in the Bank was reduced to a million, and public bankruptcy was avoided only by the issue of two millions of old notes ; of the dreary years from 1838 to 1842, when suffering met him on every side, and the memory of which, he himself said, " would never be erased from his mind," were perpetually present to his recollection. The cry, " To stop the Duke, go for gold," continually resounded in his ears.*

When once this key to his political conduct is seized,

it affords a satisfactory explanation of his whole political career. He was truly and sincerely patriotic, and actuated on every occasion by nothing but a regard for what he deemed the public good ; but he, nevertheless, acted on many in direct opposition to it, from the unhappy delusion under which he laboured in regard to guarding the treasures of the Bank of England. He was courageous, both personally and politically, for himself, but timorous for his country. It is no wonder he was so ; for he had placed it on the unstable equilibrium, and any considerable concussion might overturn at once the whole fabric. His practical sagacity led him clearly to see that any serious internal convulsion, and even the most considerable foreign war, would lead to such a run on the Bank as would, in all probability, prove fatal to that establishment, and with it entirely unhinge public credit, and render destitute millions of starving workmen. It was to avert this catastrophe that all his measures were directed. For this it was that he emancipated the Catholics in 1829, to postpone rebellion in Ireland, and surrendered Maine, by the Ashburton capitulation, in 1842, to avoid a rupture with America, and abandoned the Corn Laws, in 1846, to render England the great emporium of corn throughout the world, and thereby prevent the drain which so nearly proved fatal to the Bank in 1839. His monetary bill of 1844 was intended to lay speculation in irons, and so prevent the drain upon the metallic treasures of the nation, which indulgence in it to excess never failed to occasion. That his apprehensions were well founded, the event has decisively proved ; the only thing to be wondered at is, that he did not perceive that the danger was entirely of his own creation, by having rendered public credit dependent on the retention of gold, and that the measures he intended to avert were the greatest possible aggravation of the evil.

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12.

Explanation thus afforded of his political career.

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13.

His character in private life.

In private life, Sir Robert's character was altogether unexceptionable. Inheriting from his father, the first baronet, who made the fortune, immense wealth, he made a noble use of it. Simple and unostentatious in his habits, his tastes were refined, and he expended largely in the encouragement of the arts which elevate the mind and purify the taste. A kind and affectionate husband, a liberal father, he never deviated from correctness either in conduct or decorum, and his bitterest political enemies (and no man latterly had more) were unable to find one blot in his escutcheon, so far as domestic relations were concerned. He was by nature afflicted with a most violent temper, and his fits of anger, when a young man, were so violent that he used, when they came on, to shut himself up alone till the dark fit was over. By degrees, however, he obtained the mastery of this infirmity, and this at length so effectually that he passed with the world, at a distance, as a man of a singularly cold and phlegmatic temperament. He had all the contempt for rank, merely as such, which so often accompanies strong intellectual powers ; and he showed this, not only through his entire life, but in his injunctions to his family after his death. He declined a seat in the House of Peers in 1835, when offered by William IV. ; he respectfully refused the Garter when tendered to him, in 1846, by Queen Victoria ; and in his testament he solemnly enjoined his family never to accept honours for his services to his country, whatever they might do for their own. Faithful to his injunctions, Lady Peel, after his death, declined a peerage in her own right, pressed upon her by the Queen. Reserved in his nature, and uncommunicative in his habits, he did not seek to shine in general society, and perhaps was not so well qualified as many inferior men for such displays ; but in a select circle of a few, with whom he was intimate, the conversation of no one was more charming.¹ There was a certain *retenue*,

¹ Guizot,
Sir R. Peel,
350, 351.

however, maintained with those for whom he had the greatest regard ; he did not, like Mr Canning, unbosom himself in the most unguarded moments ; like Mr Pitt, he had many followers, but few friends. *

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The resignation of Ministers had been so long foreseen that Sir R. Peel's arrangements were complete before it took place, and the new Cabinet was announced in a few days. It presented a formidable array of talent, as, in addition to nearly all the members of the Duke of Wellington's Ministry, Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham, who had receded from the ranks of the Whigs, were included in it. Sir R. Peel, of course, was First Lord of the Treasury ; the Duke of Wellington had, at his desire, a seat in the Cabinet without any office, save that of Commander-in-Chief, attached to it. Lord Lyndhurst resumed his seat on the Woolsack. Mr Goulburn was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Sir James Graham was Home Secretary ; the Earl of Aberdeen, Foreign ; and Lord Stanley, Colonial. Lord Haddington was First Lord of the Admiralty ; and Lord Ellenborough, President of the

14.
Formation
of the new
Ministry.

* The following charming picture of Sir R. Peel in his family circle at Drayton Manor, is from the hand of no common man, and no ordinary observer :—" Dans l'automne de 1848," says M. Guizot, " je vis Sir Robert Peel au sein de sa famille, et au milieu de la population de ses terres. Lady Peel, encore belle, passionnément et modestement dévouée à son mari ; une fille charmante, mariée depuis à un fils de Lord Camoys ; trois des-fils de Sir Robert, l'un capitaine de vaisseau, déjà renommé par le plus brillant courage ; l'autre qui venait de débiter avec succès dans la Chambre des Communes ; le troisième encore livré à ses études. Sur les domaines, de nombreux et heureux fermiers, parmi lesquels un des frères de Sir Robert, qui avait préféré la vie agricole à toute autre carrière ; de grands travaux d'amélioration rurale, surtout de drainage, que Sir Robert suivait de près, et nous démontrait avec une connaissance précise des détails. Belle existence domestique, grande, simple, bien ordonné avec largeur ; dans l'intérieur de la maison une gravité affectueuse, moins animée, moins expansive, moins douce que ne le désirent et ne le comportent nos mœurs ; les souvenirs politiques consacrés par une galerie des portraits, la plupart contemporains, soit les collègues de Sir Robert dans le Gouvernement, soit les hommes distingués avec lesquels il avait eu des relations. Hors de la maison, entre le propriétaire et la population environnante, une grande distance, marquée dans les manières, mais comblée par des rapports fréquents, pleins d'équité et de bienveillance de la part de supérieur, sans apparence d'envie ni de servilité chez les inférieurs."—Guizot, *Sir R. Peel*, p. 317-318.

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1841.

Board of Control. The Cabinet exhibited, upon the whole, a splendid array of talent, and, what was of more importance to the country, an adequate intermixture of business habits and practical acquaintance with affairs; although many doubted whether each was in his proper place, and whether a transposition might not be made with benefit to the public service. In particular, Mr Goulburn seemed hardly adequate to the arduous duties of Chancellor of the Exchequer; and Lord Stanley, notwithstanding his great abilities, was not peculiarly versed in colonial affairs; but so great was the ascendancy of Sir R. Peel over his colleagues, that it was trusted his master mind would pervade every department. No difficulty was now experienced with the Ladies of the Household. The Queen, yielding to her own matured sense, and the necessities of a constitutional monarchy, parted in silence and sorrow from her old and confidential friends; and the appointment of the Duchess of Buccleuch as Mistress of the Robes led to the pleasing hope that they might be succeeded by others not less trustworthy and acceptable to her Majesty. The new Ministers, especially the Duke of Wellington and Sir R. Peel, were loudly cheered when they drove up to the palace to kiss hands on their appointment to their respective offices.¹*

¹ Ann. Reg.
1841, 199,
200; Martineau, ii.
478, 479.

If the new Ministry were strong in their talents, their

* CABINET AND OTHER APPOINTMENTS.

Cabinet.

Duke of Wellington.	
First Lord of the Treasury,	Sir R. Peel.
Lord Chancellor, .	Lord Lyndhurst.
Chancellor of the Exchequer,	Mr Goulburn. •
President of the Council	Lord Wharncliffe. •
Privy Seal, . . .	Duke of Buckingham.
Home Secretary, .	Sir James Graham.
Foreign Secretary,	Earl of Aberdeen.
Colonial Secretary, .	Lord Stanley.
First Lord of the Admiralty,	Lord Haddington.
President of the Board of Control,	Lord Ellenborough.
President of the Board of Trade,	Earl of Ripon.
Secretary at War,	Sir H. Hardinge.
Treasurer of the Navy,	Sir E. Knatchbull.

aristocratic connections, and the popular favour they enjoyed, they had need of all their advantages ; for never did men adventure upon a more difficult undertaking, nor a more arduous task await any government. It was difficult to say whether without or within the prospects of the country were most gloomy—whether foreign or domestic affairs called most loudly for immediate attention. The aspect of the continent of Europe was threatening in the extreme. Russia, which by the treaty of 13th March 1841 had acquired the absolute command of

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1841.

15.

Immense
difficulties
of the coun-
try in for-
eign affairs.*Not in the Cabinet.*

Postmaster-General,	Lord Lowther.
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, . . .	Lord G. Somerset.
Woods and Forests,	Earl of Lincoln.
Master-General of the Ordnance,	Sir G. Murray.
Master of the Mint,	W. E. Gladstone.
Secretary to the Admiralty,	Hon. Sidney Herbert.
Joint Secretaries of the Treasury,	{ Sir G. Clerk. Sir T. Freemantle.
Secretaries of the Board of Control,	{ Hon. W. Baring. J. E. Tennant.
Home Under-Secretary,	C. M. Sutton.
Foreign Under-Secretary,	Lord Canning.
Colonial Under-Secretary,	G. W. Hope.
Lords of the Treasury,	{ Alexander Pringle. H. Baring. J. Young. J. Milnes Gaskell.
Lords of the Admiralty,	{ Sir W. Gage. Sir G. Seymour. Hon. Captain Gordon. Hon. H. L. Corry.
Store-Keeper of the Ordnance,	J. R. Bonham.
Clerk of the Ordnance,	Captain Boldero.
Surveyor-General of the Ordnance,	Colonel Jonathan Peel.
Attorney-General,	Sir F. Pollock.
Solicitor-General,	Sir W. Follett.
Judge-Advocate,	Dr Njehol.
Governor-General of Canada,	Sir C. Bagot.
Lord Advocate for Scotland,	Sir W. Rae.
Solicitor-General,	D. McNeill.
Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland,	Earl De Grey.
Lord-Chancellor,	Sir E. Sugden.
Chief-Secretary,	Lord Elliot.
Attorney-General,	Mr Blackburn.
Solicitor-General,	Mr Serjeant Jackson.

-Ann. Reg. 1841, pp. 199, 200.

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1841.

Turkey by the ships of all other nations being excluded from the Black Sea, had come to the very verge of a war with Great Britain in consequence of the siege of Herat, and the struggle for the central mountains of Affghanistan. France, whose alliance with England had for the last ten years mainly contributed to the peace of Europe, had been alienated beyond redemption by the settlement of the Eastern Question without her intervention, and the defiance to her arms by the bombardment of Beyrout and Acre. Upon Spain, distracted by a savage and relentless civil war but recently extinguished, no reliance whatever could be placed ; and the Liberal government of Portugal was only upheld by the constant presence of a British fleet in the Tagus. Austria, though united with England on the Eastern Question, and a party to the attack on Acre, was too nervous about the popular tendencies of the British Government, and the frightful civil war it had kept alive in the Peninsula, not to keep aloof on questions of general politics. The rebellion in Canada had been only recently suppressed, and a large force was still required to restrain its angry spirits ; the West India colonies, steeped in ruin from the effects of negro emancipation, were only restrained by absolute impotence from breaking into open revolt ; the Cape of Good Hope was threatened by the ceaseless hostility of the Caffres, and almost stripped of the doubtful support of the Boors ; and India, involved in a perilous distant warfare in the mountains of Affghanistan, was on the verge of the greatest military disaster recorded in British annals. To complete the whole, England had got involved in a serious war with the Chinese Empire, carried on at an immense distance and at an enormous expense, in which ultimate success was doubtful, and present cost certain ; and which, in the most favourable view, promised no successful results but at a vast expenditure of blood and treasure.

Fearfully as the horizon was overcast in every direction in external relations, the prospect was still more

alarming in internal affairs ; and in truth it was the national weakness at home which rendered so formidable the dangers which threatened the State abroad. Five bad seasons in succession had nearly doubled the price of food, and augmented immensely the annual importation from abroad. The price of wheat during the whole year had been above 62s., in September it was 72s. the quarter, and this high rate had been maintained for five years—a woeful change for the working classes from 39s. to 40s., at which it had stood before the commencement of this disastrous epoch. The pressure of high prices was not alleviated to the manufacturing classes by proportionally high wages ; on the contrary, this period of distress had this peculiar and unprecedented feature, that high prices of provisions of all sorts were accompanied by ruinously low wages, especially in every branch of manufacturing industry. Power-loom weavers and coomers, who ten years before had been making 18s. a-week, could now only make 6s., and that by the most exhausting and incessant toil. Colliers and iron-miners, who four years before had earned 5s. a-day, were now at 2s. 6d., while wheat was nearly doubled in price ; and weavers by the hand-loom could with difficulty make 3d. a-day. A hopeless paralysis seemed to have fallen upon the enterprise and activity of the country ; the depression was universal and extreme, and continued without abatement during the whole of 1842 and the first half of 1843. The winters 1841-2 and 1842-3 were the most melancholy ever known in English history ; and the only comforting feature in the case was the noble patience and resignation with which their sufferings were borne by the poor. Yet such was their intensity that the only surprising thing is how a great proportion of them contrived to prolong existence at all during such a terrible and protracted period of suffering. The distress was so universal that it had ceased to be matter of dispute ; the deplorable fact was felt and lamented in

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XLI.

1841.

16.

Still darker
prospect in
internal
affairs.

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¹ Ann. Reg.
1841, 229;
Mart. ii.
519, 520;
Doubleday,
ii. 329, 331;
Personal
knowledge.

silence. In proroguing Parliament, after a short session of a few weeks, subsequent to Sir R. Peel's accession to power, the Royal Commission said: "Her Majesty has commanded us to express her deep concern for the distress which has prevailed for a considerable period in some of the principal manufacturing districts, and to assure you that you may rely upon her cordial concurrence in all measures which, after mature consideration, may be taken to prevent the recurrence of that distress."¹

17.
Statistical
details prov-
ing the dis-
tress.

This universal commercial and manufacturing suffering produced the results that might have been expected on the revenue, trade, and resources of the country. The national income sunk £1,200,000 from 1841 to 1842; while the current expenses were simultaneously increased by a similar amount, leaving a deficiency of £2,500,000, which had to be made up by loan.* The exports and imports of the nation exhibited a similar and still more alarming change:† the former had *sunk* from £53,000,000 in 1839 to £47,000,000 in 1842; the latter *increased* from £62,000,000 in 1839 to £70,000,000 in 1843;

* INCOME AND EXPENDITURE.

Years.	Income.	Expenditure besides Public Debt.	Interest of Debt.
1840	£47,567,565	£19,779,818	£29,381,718
1841	48,084,360	20,735,584	29,490,145
1842	46,965,631	21,517,549	29,428,120

—PORTER'S *Progress of the Nation*, 475, 3d edit.

† EXPORTS AND IMPORTS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

Years.	Exports—declared value.	Imports—official value.	Difference.
1839	£53,233,580	£62,004,000	£8,770,420
1840	51,406,430	67,432,964	16,026,534
1841	51,634,623	64,377,962	13,743,339
1842	47,381,623	65,204,729	17,813,706
1843	52,278,449	70,093,353	17,811,904

—PORTER, 356, 3d edit.

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1841.

the large balance, of course, having to be paid in gold or silver, to the entire destruction, under the existing monetary system, of all credit and commercial industry in the country. It was easy to see to what this large and increasing balance of imports over exports was owing. It arose from the great importation of grain during these years, in consequence of the continued unfavourable harvests and high prices, which had swelled from nothing at all in 1835 and 1836, to 3,000,000 quarters in 1842. This great import of grain cost the nation, almost all in gold and silver—wheat being on an average at 64s.—no less than £10,000,000 sterling in one year.* This state of things was sufficiently calamitous in itself; but when its effect upon the currency, and through it on the whole credit and industry of the country, is taken into view, the effect became beyond measure disastrous. The gold and silver held by the Bank of England, which in 1838 had been above £10,000,000, had sunk on 15th October 1839 to £2,545,000, and even in February 1842 had only risen to £5,600,000; as a necessary consequence of which, the notes of the Bank in circulation, which in 1818 had been £27,771,000, with a population little more than half, and transactions not a third of the present, and in 1835 and 1836 had been £19,147,000 and £18,154,000 respectively, had sunk at the first period to £16,732,000,¹ and at the second to £17,500,000.¹ Whoever will consider these figures with attention, will at once perceive what was the cause of the universal distress, and how, under the existing monetary system, five bad seasons in

¹ Tooke
on Prices,
ii. 386, iii.
78, iv. 437,
439; Por-
ter, 94, 146,
356, 475.

* IMPORTS OF WHEAT INTO GREAT BRITAIN FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

Years.	Quarters.	Price per Qr.	Years.	Quarters.	Price per Qr.
1834	64,653	39s. 8d.	1839	2,590,734	70s. 6d.
1835	28,483	35s. 3d.	1840	2,389,732	65s. 4d.
1836	24,826	57s. 9d.	1841	2,619,702	64s. 4d.
1837	244,087	55s. 10d.	1842	2,977,302	57s. 3d.
1838	1,854,452	64s. 7d.			

—PORTER, 140. TOOKE *On Prices*, ii. 390, and iii. 413.

CHAP. XLI. 1841. succession had come to tell with decisive and ruinous effect upon the whole commercial and manufacturing interests of the country. Nor will it appear surprising that, in England and Wales alone, the paupers had risen in the latter year to 1,427,000, of whom 85,000 were able-bodied, being about an eleventh of the entire population.*

18.
Immense
difficulties
in finance,
and from
the inade-
quate na-
tional ar-
maments.

When such was the state of the country, it was next to impossible to see where an increase of revenue was to be looked for, or even the existing annual deficit of £2,500,000 of be filled up. Yet was it absolutely necessary to make a great effort in finance, and that without delay, for this deficit, large as it was, promised to be doubled in the ensuing year by the enormous expenses of the Affghanistan expedition, which had already cost

* PAUPERS RELIEVED IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

Years.	Paupers.	Of whom able-bodied.
1840,	1,199,529	...
1841,	1,299,048	...
1842,	1,427,187	85,171
1843,	1,539,490	99,196

—PORTER, p. 94.

The following official table exhibits a melancholy picture of the effect of this long-continued distress upon the duration and chances of life, especially in manufacturing and mining districts, where the chances of life are, under the most favourable circumstances, so precarious :—

DIED OUT OF 10,000 PERSONS BORN IN—

			Died under 5.	Died under 20.	Died under 40.	Lived above 40.
			2865	3756	5031	4969
manu- facturing districts.	Rutlandshire,	.	3805	4580	6111	3869
	London,	.	4687	5896	7061	2939
	(Bradford,	.	4462	5889	7300	2700
	Macclesfield,	.	4790	5911	7117	2883
	Wigan,	.	4947	6083	7462	2538
	Preston,	.	4864	6017	7319	2601
	Bury,	.	4879	6005	7367	2633
	Stockport,	.	4939	6113	7459	2541
	Bolton,	.	5286	6213	7441	2559
	Leeds,	.	5090	6133	7337	2663
	(Holbeck,	.				

The immense proportion of deaths in the manufacturing districts under five years of age, being from 47 to 51 per cent in them all, and about double of those in the rural under the same age, is particularly remarkable, and apparently points to some fixed law of nature.—See the Table in *Parl. Deb.*, lix. 687, Sept. 23, 1841; and DOUBLEDAY, ii. 330.

£10,000,000, and left a deficit of £2,500,000 on the Indian revenue, which could only be made up from the exchequer of Great Britain. Add to this, that not only had France been irritated in the highest degree by the course pursued by England in the Levant, but a new cause of discord, to be immediately noticed, had sprung up about Otaheite and its sable queen, Pomare, which threatened still farther to embroil the two nations. Incessant demands were daily made on the Government for additional troops, both from the colonies and the manufacturing districts of Great Britain; but yet the national forces were only 92,000, exclusive of India, of whom more than a half were absorbed by the colonies. And as the disturbed state of Ireland required more than a half of the 45,000 left in the British Islands to be permanently stationed in that country, the force in England was so much reduced, that we have the authority of the late Lord Hardinge for the assertion, that when he came into office in 1841, if an invasion from France had taken place, he could not have collected, after garrisoning the sea fortresses, more than 10,000 men and 42 guns to defend London, and the greater part of the latter were so crazy, that if taken into a wet clay field they would have gone to pieces.* At this period Louis Philippe had 300,000 regular soldiers disposable in France; and while England had only ten ships of the line afloat in the Mediterranean, France had seventeen.

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XLI.
1841.

As might naturally have been expected, this long-continued and poignant suffering produced at length serious disturbances, which broke out in the manufacturing districts. Indeed, the amount of distress ascertained to exist by the Committee of Inquiry, appointed by the Ministry in the autumn of 1841, was such, that the only surprising thing was, how a universal disruption of society did not take place. In Carlisle, one-fourth of the

19.
Great dis-
tress in the
manufactur-
ing districts.

* The Author had this from Lord Hardinge's own lips, and he made the same statement afterwards in Parliament.

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XLI.

1842.

inhabitants were found to be in a state bordering on starvation. In Stockport above half the master-spinners had failed, 3000 houses were shut up and uninhabited, and 5000 persons were walking the streets in a state of idleness. At Leeds the heap of stones broken by the paupers had swelled to 150,000 tons, when all the workmen employed on it were taken into the workhouse. In Manchester the sale of new clothes for the poorer classes had almost entirely ceased ; nothing could find a market among them but shirts, and patches to mend the old garments. The condition of the shopkeepers, especially of the humbler class, was scarcely less distressing, while poor-rates were daily increasing beyond all precedent ; their trade had sunk to a third, often not more than a tenth, of what it had been five years before. In Dorsetshire, the wages of an able-bodied labourer were only 4s. a-week, and the best could not earn more than 6s., and this with wheat at 70s. the quarter. In a word, the condition of the labouring poor in all the manufacturing districts was such that it could not by possibility become worse without multitudes being swept by absolute famine into an untimely grave.¹

¹ Spectator,
1842, 27,
32, 337,
630, 637;
Mart. ii.
520, 521.

20.
Serious riots
in England
in autumn,
1842.

With all the magnanimous patience and long-suffering of the working-classes, it could not be expected that this universal distress in the manufacturing districts could continue for any great length of time without producing acts of insubordination and violence ; and owing to the small military force in the country, they were of such a kind as to excite the most serious apprehension in the Government. The pitmen in the coal districts, and the miners in the iron, were particularly riotous ; for their wages, though much reduced, were *not so low as to preclude effort*, and they fell under the guidance of delegates and itinerant orators, who arrayed them in trade-unions, the usual sad termination at this period of general distress, in order, by force and violence, to arrest the fall of wages. At Dudley, Stourbridge, Merthyr-Tydvil, and several other places in South Wales, there were

serious riots requiring the interposition of the military. In the Potteries, a body of six thousand men collected together, and kept Staffordshire in a continual state of anxiety and alarm. In Manchester and its vicinity the influx of rioters became so great in August 1842, that it evidently proceeded from some common design, and the whole troops which London could spare, including a regiment of the Guards, were despatched, at two hours' notice, by railway to the scene of danger. Even after their arrival, the forces of the insurgents were so large that it appeared at one time as if the whole of Lancashire was in their possession. Mills were stopped, machinery destroyed, windows smashed, and threatening letters sent in every direction. Three rioters were shot dead by the military at Barslem, and several wounded. Lady Peel received an anonymous letter which intimated that on a certain night Sir Robert's splendid seat, Drayton Manor, would be burned down. She had the courage to remain after procuring a guard, and the threatened attack was not made. It was fully ascertained that these violent acts were organised and directed by the Chartist leaders, and a sense of this, joined to the presence of a large military force collected from all quarters in the district, at length restored a forced tranquillity.¹

CHAP.
XLI.

1842.

¹ Morning
Post, Aug.
1842; Spec-
tator, 1842,
800; Mart.
ii, 522, 523;
Morning
Chron.
1842.

In Scotland matters assumed a still more formidable aspect; for the people there, slow to move, and not readily excited, are tenacious of purpose, and, when once fairly roused, are capable of the most desperate acts. There is a certain amount of distress which so paralyses the mind as to render disturbance impossible; there is another which inflames it. Paisley, in Renfrewshire, in August 1842, had attained the former stage; for there were seventeen thousand persons out of employment, or working for 2½d. a-day; and so sunk were their spirits, that they remained quiet, and even recruiting for the army had ceased. In Lanarkshire the case was different; the colliers' and iron-miners' wages had sunk from 5s. to 2s. 9d. or 2s. 6d. a-day; but even the reduced sum was

22.
Still more
serious riots
in Scotland.
Aug. 1842.

CHAP. capable not only of supporting life, but maintaining
 XLI. vigour. The consequence was, that a great strike took
 1842. place of the colliers and iron-miners in that county, in
 . the first week of August 1842, for an advance of wages,
 which soon came to embrace fifteen thousand persons.
 The men on strike openly declared that they were not
 going to starve when the land was covered with food ;
 that there were potatoes enough in the fields, and corn
 in the barnyards ; and that they would help themselves.
 They were as good as their word. Dividing themselves
 into detachments of a hundred or a hundred and fifty each,
 armed with muskets and clubs, they entered at night
 into all the most tempting fields of potatoes or barn-
 yards of corn, and forcibly carried off the produce before
 the eyes of the trembling proprietors. So general did
 this species of depredation become, that every field or
 yard where provisions were to be found in the mineral
 districts of the country, required to be guarded at night
 by armed men, as is the case in the worst-ordered parts
 of the East ; and the whole night long a continued roll
 of firearms was to be heard in these districts, proceeding
 either from the guards firing to intimidate the depre-
 dators, or the latter to enforce their iniquitous designs.
 To complete the public danger, the only regular regiment
 in the country was drawn away, at the very worst of the
 disturbance, to form an escort for the Queen in her
 progress from Dundee to Blair-Atholl, where her Majesty
 was to pass the autumn ; and the barracks in Glasgow,
 containing a considerable depot of arms, were left under
 the charge of a dismounted body of eighteen invalid
 troopers, of whom only *five* were fit for duty.¹

¹ Personal
 knowledge.

22.
 Measures of
 repression
 adopted.

The great thing, in the first instance, was to prevent
 this extraordinary state of things from coming to the
 knowledge of the insurgents in the mining districts, who
 would instantly have taken advantage of it. For this pur-
 pose orders were given to have the barrack-gates open, and
 to parade the few invalids in an ostentatious manner dur-
 ing the day in the yard, but to have everything ready to

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repel an assault at night. By these means the absence of the main body was never discovered till after they had returned ; but even when they had done so, and a few troops of horse and companies of infantry were stationed in the disturbed mineral districts, it was no easy matter to know how to make head against the systematic depredation which, over a space of fifteen miles square, was going forward. So perfect was the system of espionage established, that wherever the military went with any of the county magistrates during the night, everything was quiet, and not a vestige of disorder was to be seen ; but meanwhile the distant report of firearms, which lasted as long as it was dark, proved that it had commenced or was apprehended in other quarters where there were no means of resistance ; and reports of half-a-dozen burglaries or forcible invasion of fields were received next morning. At length it was stopped in a very singular way. The sheriff of Lanarkshire issued a proclamation, recommending no resistance to the bodies of armed men which invaded the farmers' premises, but enjoining the people to watch the retiring body at a distance, and send information to him of the place they had gone to with their spoil ; and next night he surrounded the village with a troop of yeomanry, who turned out with the greatest alacrity on the occasion, searched every house, and carried off all the men of those houses in which suspected articles were found, for judicial examination.¹

¹ Personal knowledge.

This system, vigorously applied in several instances, let the insurgents see they might lose more than they gained by their nocturnal depredations, and they generally ceased. But the colliers continued the strike with dogged resolution the whole winter, and it terminated only in March 1843 from sheer exhaustion, and when the men were compelled to accept lower wages than their employers had originally offered. This strike lasted seven months, kept at least fifty thousand persons all that time in a state of privation of the severest kind, doubled while it lasted the price of coal, and cost

23.
Their effects, and results of the strike.

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Oct. 2.

¹ Personal
knowledge.

^{24.}
Skilful use
made of
these cir-
cumstances.

² Mart. ii.
529, 530;
Ann. Reg.
1843, 3, 4.

the nation at least £600,000. Such was the exasperation of the miners during its continuance, that on one occasion, when the military had been imprudently withdrawn from Airdrie, the centre of the mining district, by the authorities, a mob of three thousand persons got up in an hour, shut up the police, twenty in number, in a house, and set fire to the building; and it was only from the accidental circumstance of the hay ignited and thrust in to the aid of the conflagration being damp, from the first shower which had fallen for two months, that the whole police, with five prisoners whom they had in custody, were not burned alive.¹ *

This universal distress in the manufacturing and mining districts complicated in a very serious degree Sir R. Peel's position, and may be regarded as one of the chief causes of the split in his party which so soon after took place. The Anti-Corn-Law League made a skilful use of the general suffering, and turned it to admirable account in their assault on the ancient protective system of the country. They constantly held it forth as having arisen entirely from the monopoly of agricultural produce which the landlords enjoyed, which prevented other nations from being enriched by the sale to us of their grain, and thereby disabled them from purchasing in return any considerable amount of our manufactures. In proof of this, they triumphantly referred to the opposite condition of the manufacturing and commercial interests in the country, the former of which was involved in universal and deep distress, while the latter was enjoying comparative affluence, with produce of all kinds at nearly double the price they had brought some years before.² It must be confessed that the argument and reference *were plausible in the highest degree*, insomuch that not only the ignorant multitude, who were actuated merely by a sense of suffering, but many sensible and thoughtful

* The Author, suddenly sent for in the night, arrived with the military at two in the morning, and arrested the delinquent leaders, who were transported at the next assizes.

persons, began to embrace the opinion, that the real cause of the long-continued commercial distress had at last been discovered, and that there was no chance of its being removed until an entire freedom in the commerce of grain was established.

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The anti-Corn-Law orators used arguments directly opposite to each other, according as they addressed agricultural or manufacturing assemblages; and yet, strange to say, they were readily listened to by both those opposite parties. To the master manufacturers they held forth that the reduction which Free Trade would immediately make in the price of grain would necessarily draw after it a corresponding fall in the wages of labour, and thus enable them to regain the foreign markets which had of late been visibly slipping from their hands. The master manufacturers all believed this, and it was this conviction which rendered them such strenuous supporters of the anti-Corn-Law agitation. To the operative workmen they affirmed that the stimulus the change would give to trade would be such as to cause their wages to rise instead of falling with the decline in the price of provisions, and that by supporting the League they would realise what had been promised them by the Reform Bill, but never yet obtained—namely, a duplication of wages and halving of the cost of food. To the landlords and farmers they held out the prospect of such a reduction in the price of manufactured articles of all sorts, and such an increased consumption of grain from the universal prosperity, as would more than compensate the fall in its price. Strange to say, these opposite and contradictory views were alike embraced by the respective audiences to which they were addressed; the wish, in every instance, being the father to the thought, and preparing a willing reception of such arguments as promised a relief by the change to the suffering under which they almost all laboured. And yet was that suffering in reality owing to entirely different causes from what either party imagined, and certain to be dreadfully aggravated,

25.
Opposite
arguments
adduced by
the Anti-
Corn-Law
League, and
real causes
of the dis-
tress.

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instead of being removed, by the remedies proposed for its alleviation. It arose from five bad seasons in succession acting upon a monetary system rendered entirely dependent on the retention of gold, which the great importation of grain paid for in specie rendered it impossible to retain ; coupled with the great diminution of the export trade to America, which, in consequence of General Jackson's democratic crusade against the banks in the United States in 1837, had sunk *from twelve to three millions and a half*.* As such, the promised free trade in grain, and consequent increase of the export drain of gold in adverse seasons, could not fail to be the greatest possible aggravation of the danger to the mercantile classes, and so the nation was too fatally taught in the years 1847 and 1848. But no one then anticipated these dangers ; and meanwhile the great influence on public opinion which the Anti-Corn-Law League had obtained, augmented seriously the difficulties of Sir R. Peel's position, for he could not by possibility please both sections of his supporters, nor secure the support of the urban without alienating the county constituencies.

26.
Short ses-
sion of 1841.

Parliament adjourned, after a short session, on 7th October 1841. The only step of importance taken during its continuance was the addition of £3,000,0000 to the National Debt, in the form of a loan to meet the deficiency of the year, and the certain deficit of the next, before any new measures of finance could be adopted. Ministers *claimed the leisure of the recess*, which was little more than three months, to prepare *their measures to meet the crisis which had arisen*. It was no easy matter to do so, for they had to close a deficit which for four years had

* BRITISH MANUFACTURES EXPORTED TO AMERICA—DECLARED VALUE.

1835,	.	.	£10,568,455	1840,	.	.	£5,283,020
1836,	.	.	12,425,605	1841,	.	.	7,098,642
1837,	.	.	4,695,225	1842,	.	.	3,528,807
1838,	.	.	7,585,710	1843,	.	.	5,013,504
1839,	.	.	8,839,204				

—PORTER's *Progress of the Nation*, p. 360, 3d edit.

been eating like a cancer into the vitals of the State, by raising an increased revenue out of a suffering and starving people. The attempt, however, was made, and in a courageous spirit ; and the remainder of this work is little more than an exposition, so far as the domestic history of England is concerned, of the consequences of the measures adopted for its furtherance. From this time down to the fall of Sebastopol, the annals of its internal legislation, instead of a confused and complicated tissue of abortive or contradictory measures which no art can render interesting, and which the historian himself has great difficulty in understanding, exhibit a steady and consistent system, which, for good or for evil, produced durable and important results, and which must for ever command the attention of mankind, from the immense consequences in both hemispheres with which it was attended.

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Parliament met on the 3d February 1842 ; and the anxiety of the nation was wound up to the very highest pitch as to the remedial measures which were to be proposed. It was generally understood, from the character of the Prime Minister and the great strength of his Government, that they would be of a sweeping and decisive character ; and the agricultural party had already taken the alarm in consequence of the retirement, in the middle of January, of the Duke of Buckingham from the Cabinet and office of Lord Privy Seal, who was succeeded by the Duke of Buccleuch. As he was the uncompromising friend of the landed interest, his retirement from the Cabinet was justly regarded as of ominous import to that portion of the community. The session was opened with unusual splendour, as well from the great concourse of members whom the importance of the measures to be submitted to their consideration had attracted, as from the presence of the King of Prussia, who had come to England to stand sponsor for the Prince of Wales, and who was present with her Majesty on the occasion. The joyous

27.
Opening of
the Parlia-
ment of
1842.
Feb. 3.

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1842.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1842, 2, 3;
Mart. ii.
529.

28.
Sir R. Peel's
plan.

event of the birth of an heir to the throne had taken place on the 9th November preceding. The Queen's Speech noticed with deep regret the continued distress in the manufacturing districts of the country, and bore testimony to the exemplary patience and fortitude with which it had been borne, and recommended to the consideration of the House "the state of the laws which affect the importation of corn, and of other articles, the produce of foreign countries." The Address was carried in both Houses without a division; the attention of all parties, and of the whole country, being fixed on the remedial measures expected from Sir R. Peel with a degree of intensity which never had been witnessed on any former occasion.¹

The eventful debate came on on the 9th February, in a very crowded House, surrounded by a still greater multitude around the doors, which saluted the members as they passed with loud cheers or groans according as they were understood to favour or oppose the removal of the duties on grain. Cries of "No Sliding Scale!" "Total Repeal!" "Fixed Duty!" were heard on all sides. Corn at the moment was 62s. 9d. the quarter, and they fully expected by the measures in preparation it would in a few weeks be at 45s. Below the bar were the Duke of Cambridge and numerous members of the Upper House. Six hundred anti-Corn-Law delegates marched down to the House, and on being refused admission to the lobby, thronged the doors, and added to the general excitement. Already, since the meeting of Parliament, 994 petitions had been presented for the total repeal of the Corn Laws. Sir R. Peel looked grave; he listened unmoved to the cries for the entire removal of the obnoxious duty. At length, amidst breathless silence, he rose and said in substance: "The distress which every one sees and laments, and which has now continued for five years, may be ascribed to the establishment of joint-stock banks, and the connection subsisting between them and our manufacturing establishments, and the consequent immi-

gration of labourers from the agricultural to the manufacturing and mining districts ; the immense building speculations which have recently been going on ; the great increase of mechanical power ; the reaction of the monetary crisis in the United States, and the consequent diminution of the demand for our manufactures : from thence the interruption of our commerce with China, and the apprehension, which has hardly yet subsided, of the renewal of a general war in Europe. Extend as you will your foreign commerce, you may depend upon it that it is not a necessary consequence that the means of employment for manual labour will be proportionally augmented. While I admit the existence of commercial distress, while I deplore the suffering it has occasioned, I feel bound to declare that I cannot attribute the distress to the extent to which by some it is supposed to be imputable to the Corn Laws.¹

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¹ *Parl. Deb.*
lx. 203;
Ann. Reg.
1842, 16,
17; *Mart.*
ii. 529, 530.

“ The export of our manufactures has fallen off considerably in the last two years ; their declared value in 1840 fell short of 1839 by £1,817,000. This has chiefly been owing to the great diminution of exports to the United States, which in 1839 were £8,939,000, and had fallen in 1840 to £5,283,000.* This is no doubt a very serious defalcation ; but it is fortunate that it is in course of being compensated, and more than compensated, by the great increase in the exports to our own colonies. In 1837 they were £11,208,000 ; in 1840 they had risen to £15,497,000, and they are still in a course of progressive increase.† The state of our trade with the principal countries of Europe is equally decisive against the

29.

Continued.

* In 1842, the year in which Sir Robert Peel was speaking, the exports of Great Britain to the United States were only £3,500,000, while six years before they had been £12,500,000.

† EXPORTS TO OUR COLONIES—DECLARED VALUE.

1837,	.	.	£11,208,000		1839,	.	.	£14,363,000
1838,	.	.	12,208,000		1840,	.	.	15,497,000.

—SIR ROBERT PEEL'S Speech, *Parl. Deb.* *lx.* 207.

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idea that the depression which exists is to be ascribed to the operation of the Corn Laws. Our exports to Germany, Holland, and Belgium, so far from having declined when these laws were in operation, have, on the contrary, steadily increased. The exports to these three countries in 1837 were £8,742,000; in 1838, £9,606,000; in 1839, £9,660,000; in 1840, £9,704,000; so that, even with respect to those countries from whom we derive our chief supplies of grain when we stand in need of it, which are supposed to be such formidable competitors in manufactures, and from which the demand for British manufactures is said to be rapidly diminishing on account of our exclusion of their produce, it still appears that there has been, on the whole, a progressive increase in the amount of our commerce carried on with them. I cannot therefore infer that the operation of the Corn Laws is to be charged with the depression which is at present so severely felt in many branches of trade. I see other causes in operation which are sufficient in a great degree to account for the evils which no one can deny to exist.

30.
Continued.

“Those who argue against the continuance of the Corn Laws are enabled to appeal to arguments which give them a very great advantage. They urge that they impose a tax upon bread, upon the subsistence of the people, and that this burden is imposed for the benefit of a peculiar class. It is easy to see what impression an argument of this sort is calculated to make, especially upon those who suppose they are suffering under the system complained of. A comparison is often made also between the price of corn in this and other countries where it is grown cheaper, and the inference is immediately drawn, that if the people of this country were put on the same footing with respect to the articles of subsistence, they would be benefited by the whole amount of the effected reduction in price. It appears to me that any conclusion founded upon such a position will be *altogether erroneous*. The question is, whether you will improve the condition of the

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labouring classes by effecting a reduction in the price of their food? No position can be more unfounded. The true question is, not what is the price of food, but what is the command which existing wages give the labouring classes over all that constitutes the enjoyments of life, whether they be necessities or luxuries? Judging by this standard, the labouring classes in Great Britain have no reason to envy those of any other country. There is no greater error than to suppose that a great reduction in the price of various articles, and particularly of food, must necessarily lead to a great increase in the comforts and enjoyments of the labouring classes in this country.

“So far from this being the case, the fact appears to be directly the reverse. Generally speaking, wherever food is very low-priced, the condition of the labouring poor is miserable. I will begin with Prussia. I admit that meat is dearer in this country, that corn is dearer, that all the great articles of human sustenance are much dearer here than in Prussia. But what then? Are the people better off in Prussia than in this country? Do they enjoy and have at their command a greater share of the necessities and conveniences of life? So far from doing so, it appears from the evidence collected by Dr Bowring, and referred to in the Report of the Committee for the Revision of the Import Duties, that while each individual in England consumes, on an average, a quarter of wheat a-year, in Prussia the consumption is only a barrel, or an eighth part as much, the difference being made up of rye, a very inferior grain. Then as to sugar, the average consumption in Britain is seventeen pounds a-head; in France it is only five pounds a-head; in the states of the German League, four pounds; in Europe generally, two and a half pounds. It is calculated that the people of this country consume fifty pounds of meat annually, at the very lowest. Some writers say one hundred pounds; but take it at the lowest figure, it is much more than they consume in Prussia, which is only thirty-five pounds. Examples of this sort, to

31.
Continued.

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which many others may be added in regard to tea, coffee, tobacco, butter, and other articles of general consumption from every country in Europe, prove how fallacious the idea is, that a low price of provisions is an evidence of general prosperity and well-being. On the contrary, it is generally the reverse. A low price of provisions is an indication of a small demand for the better sorts of them, owing to a still lower price of labour.

32.
Continued.

“ In arriving at a just and safe conclusion on this subject, it is most important to determine, if possible, whether; in ordinary years, this country is able to supply itself with the necessary amount of provisions. I am by no means prepared to admit that it is not. If, indeed, we were to form our opinion from the last four years, I should be compelled to conclude that we were dependent for a large portion of our annual supply on foreign nations, for our annual importation of foreign corn into this country, during that period, has been 2,300,000 quarters. But they were all uncommonly bad seasons. If we go back for a longer period, one of twelve or thirteen years, it will be found that the whole did not amount to more than twelve or thirteen millions of quarters; for from July 5, 1828, to July 5, 1841, the whole wheat and wheaten flour imported was just 13,470,000 quarters, being somewhat less than a million of quarters a-year. For six years, from 1830 to 1836, the importation of foreign wheat was almost nothing. The conclusion to be drawn from this is, that there is no ground for supposing that the country, in ordinary seasons, is not capable of supporting itself from its own resources, and that to look for any rapid or great change in the condition of the working classes from any extensive change of the Corn Laws, would subject you to great disappointment. My firm belief is—I am now speaking with reference to those who wish for an absolute repeal of those laws—that if the House of Commons should be induced to pledge itself to a total repeal, which *we on this side of the House deprecate so*

much, you will, without permanently relieving the manufacturing, superadd to it the severest agricultural distress.

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33.

Concluded.

“ With respect to those who advocate a fixed instead of a variable duty on corn, it must be recollected, that whatever odium attaches to the imposition of a variable duty, must equally apply to a fixed. Both proceed on the principle that agriculture requires protection, and both must in the end be defended by the same arguments. If I had been of opinion that a fixed duty was preferable to a variable one, I should not have hesitated to propose a fixed duty for the adoption of this House. But I do not see how a fixed duty could either be maintained in periods of scarcity, or how, if maintained, it could be a sufficient protection for our agriculturists. You cannot expect in bad seasons to be independent of foreign supply ; but I retain the opinion which I expressed some time ago, that it is *of the utmost importance to the interests of this country that you should be as much as possible independent of foreign supply*. By this I do not mean that you should be in a state of absolute independence, for that perhaps is impossible, but that we should be in that state, that if we resort to foreign nations for supplies, those supplies should be for the purpose of making up deficiencies, rather than as the chief sources of subsistence. I cannot bring myself to the conclusion that there must be a periodical, or even an annual, importation of foreign corn, in order to provide for the wants of the people of this country. Therefore I think that a variable or sliding scale, as it is called, is required, for it alone can meet the cases alike of abundant harvests, when importation might be injurious at one time, and deficient harvests, which might render it indispensable at another. It is by this means that you are most likely to realise the great desideratum in political science—that of an abundant supply with a steady remunerating price.¹ I should say that for the interests of agriculture it would be desirable that the price of corn

¹ Parl. Deb.
xlix. 202,
213, 227;
Ann. Reg.
1842, 16,
23.

CHAP. should if possible be made to vary between 54s. and 58s.
 XLI. The average of the last ten years is 56s. 11d. ; and I do
 1842. *not think that it is for the interests of agriculture that
 it should be higher, nor do I see any lasting advantage
 to manufactures from its being lower."*

34.
 The Ministerial plan. The Ministerial plan consisted in the adoption of a
 new sliding-scale, considerably lower than the former,
 but still calculated to afford a considerable protection to
 agriculture. At 50s., and under 51s., the duty on wheat
 was to be 20s., and from that point it was to fall 1s.
 with every 1s. the price rose till it reached 73s., when it
 was to be 1s. only, and remain fixed at that amount
 above that point. On barley, the duty at 25s. the quar-
 ter was to be 11s., falling with every 1s. rise in the price
 to 37s., when it was to be 1s. only. On oats at 18s. the
 quarter the duty was to be 8s., falling with every 1s.
 rise in the price till it reached 27s., when it was to be 1s.
 only. It was part of Sir R. Peel's plan that this re-
 duction on the duties levied on foreign grain should go
 hand-in-hand with a proportional reduction in the duties
 on nearly all other articles of import—in particular, live
 1 Ann. Reg. animals, meat, and almost all kinds of manufactured
 1842, 27; articles ; but the paramount importance of the proposed
 Parl. Deb. alteration on the Corn Laws led to the debate and sense
 ix. 235, of the House being taken first on them alone.¹
 236.

35.
 Answer of On the other hand, it was contended by Lord John
 Lord John Russell and Lord Palmerston : "It is now a fixed
 Russell and principle of political philosophy, that the best way to
 Lord Pal- regulate commercial matters is not to legislate at all on
 merston. the subject, but to leave the seller, or producer, and the
 purchaser, to adjust their respective interests as they them-
 selves may incline. Corn is no exception to this rule.
 The principle of buying in the cheapest market and
 selling in the dearest, is not less applicable to that than
 to other objects of commerce. Adam Smith, it is true,
 states, as an exception to this principle, the case of a
 number of persons having been long engaged in a parti-

cular branch of manufacture, in which case humanity may require that the freedom of trade should only be restored by slow gradations. Mr Malthus, too, another great authority, admits that corn is an exception, as you ought as far as possible to render the country independent of foreign states for its food. *But there seems to be no solid foundation for the latter exception. We*

are not, we cannot be independent of foreign nations, any more than they can of us. It is admitted that, for the last four years, 2,300,000 quarters of foreign corn have been imported ; that is to say, two millions of our people have been dependent on foreign countries for their daily food. At least five millions of our people are dependent on the supplies of cotton from America, of foreign wool, or foreign silk. Independence of other countries, therefore, is a chimera which it is in vain for a great commercial nation to pursue ; and even were it reached, it would be attended with no visible benefit. It is impossible that the time should ever arise when you might not find some part of the world from which you might derive your supplies. The true independence of a great commercial nation is to be found, not in raising all the produce it requires within its own bounds, but in attaining such a pre-eminence in commerce that the time can never arise when other nations will not be compelled, for their own sakes, to minister to its wants.

“The duties proposed to be levied by the new scale are in the highest degree prohibitory. 20s. are to be levied on wheat when the price is 51s. Now it appears from the consular returns, that the usual price of wheat free on board at Dantzic is 40s., to which, if 10s. 6d. be added for the price of the transit, we have 50s. 6d. as the price at which Dantzic wheat can be sold in this country. If to this you add 20s. duty, you raise the price of imported wheat at once to 70s., a price at which it never can be imported with profit, unless prices have

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reached famine levels. Indeed, the new scale will exclude all importation till prices are above 61s. ; and when it does begin, owing to the prices having risen, and the harbours being practically opened, the result will be, a great import of foreign grain, a great consequent drain on the Bank for gold to pay for it, an immediate contraction of issues, and widespread commercial distress. Many millions must be paid, and you have no means of doing so by sending out goods, because you have no regular trade.

37.

Continued.

“ There is nothing of such importance to this country as to extend its commercial relations with the United States of America. There are to be found nations rapidly increasing in population and resources, which could furnish you to any extent with the means of subsistence, and take in return any conceivable amount of your manufactures. Around the great inland seas, formed in its progress to the ocean by the St Lawrence, is a cluster of five nations arising, extending from the Lakes on the north to the Ohio on the south. The territory *they inhabit is twice as large as France, and six times as large as England. It contains 180,000,000 of acres, a large portion of which is of surpassing fertility. The population of this cluster of states already exceeds 300,000 : if the same rate of progress shall be maintained for the next twelve years, it will contain 12,000,000. Yet are they at such a distance from this country, that they can never be formidable competitors to our farmers ; for even without a duty, wheat can never be sent from thence to Britain for less than 43s. to 47s. They would be glad to receive your manufactures in exchange for the food which they send you ; but how can they do so if you refuse to receive their grain, or do what is the same thing, load it with such duties as make it not worth their while to send it ? Were it otherwise—were a free commercial intercourse established with them, there is no saying how long you might continue to furnish them*

with manufactured goods, or how extensive and lucrative might be the commerce you might carry on with them. However rising may be the manufactures of the United States, there is not enough of that species of industry, and probably there will not be for a very long time, to furnish with clothes and other articles of rude comfort this great population.

“ If a moderate fixed duty were established, you would have a complete change effected in the corn trade. Instead of gambling transactions, which the system of taking the average prices in the great towns has a direct tendency to foster, you would establish a sound and advantageous trade ; and instead of the merchant hurrying at every rise in price to the foreign market on the Continent, and thus needlessly enhancing the price of corn, you would establish a steady and well-regulated barter, which would at the same time supply your wants, and establish new fields for the consumption of the produce of your manufacturing industry. Under such a system the merchant would make his arrangements for buying a supply of corn in those places where it was cheapest, and would bring it home at a period when he thought it would be best disposed of both to the country and himself. Above all, by such a system you would extend greatly your commercial relations both of export and import with the United States. Were this system once thoroughly established and acted upon, England would become the great corn emporium of the world, and a supply of food would be secured for its inhabitants both at the cheapest and the most equitable rates.

38.
Continued.

“ Why is the earth on which we live divided into different zones and climates ? Why do different countries yield different productions to people experiencing similar wants ? Why are they intersected with mighty rivers, the natural highways of nations ? Why are lands the most distant brought into contact by that very ocean which seems to separate them ? Why, sir, it is that

39.
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man may be made dependent on man. It is that the exchange of commodities may be accompanied by the extension and diffusion of knowledge, by the interchange of mutual benefits engendering mutual kind feelings, multiplying and confirming friendly relations. It is, that Commerce may freely go forth, leading Civilisation with one hand and Peace with the other, to render mankind happier, wiser, better. This is the dispensation of Providence, this is the decree of that Power which created and disposed the universe. But in the face of it, with arrogant presumptuous folly, the dealers in restrictive duties fly, fettering the inborn energies of man, and setting up their miserable legislation instead of the great standing laws of nature."¹*

¹ Parl. Deb.
ix. 346,
519; Ann.
Reg. 1838,
41.

40.
The bill
passes both
Houses, and
various
amend-
ments are
brought out.
April 5.

The House divided upon this debate, when there appeared for Lord John Russell's amendment 226, against it 349—majority for Sir R. Peel, 123. This division was of course decisive of the fate of the measure in the Lower House: the second reading passed by a majority of 284 to 176. An amendment, proposed by Mr Christopher, and supported by the whole strength of the Protectionists, with the object of raising the scale of duties, was rejected by a majority of 306 to 104; a majority which was justly regarded as ominous of the fate of the whole Corn Laws at no distant period. A resolution proposed by Mr Cobden on the third reading, to the effect of abrogating the duties altogether, was in like manner rejected by 236 to 86. Thus, so far as could be gathered from the votes of the House, it was resolved to support the middle course, stand by the Minister, and to avoid the extremes on either side. In the House of Lords the bill was, upon the whole, favourably received, although the Duke of Buckingham expressed the greatest alarm at the measure. It was supported, however, by Lord Winchilsea and a number of the ultra-

* The concluding striking paragraph is taken *verbatim* from Lord Palmerston's splendid peroration.—*Parl. Deb.* xlix. 619.

Tories, as well as the whole Ministerialists. The second reading passed without opposition ; but Lord Melbourne afterwards moved the substitution of a fixed duty for the sliding-scale, and Lord Brougham the total abolition of all duties, both of which were rejected, the former by a majority of 117 to 49, the latter by 87 to 6. The bill then passed and became law without any farther opposition.¹

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Ann. Reg.
1842, 41,
79; Parl.
Deb. ix.
620, 1082,
1167, lxii.
75, 722,
804.

During the progress of the measure, the nation, as might have been expected on a question of so much importance, and so interesting to large bodies of men on both sides, was seriously agitated on the subject. At first great dissatisfaction was expressed in the manufacturing towns, and in some of them Sir R. Peel was even burned in effigy for having proposed the retention of any duty at all on foreign grain. The landed proprietors also, and farmers in several places—especially those districts where wheat was largely grown—though not so noisy in the expression of their disapprobation, were not less the prey of serious apprehension as to the ability of British agriculture, oppressed as it was with so many burdens, to maintain its ground against foreign competition. By degrees, however, these feelings were softened down on both sides, and the nation generally acquiesced in the change, regarding it, though for different reasons, as if not the best that either could have desired, at least the best which, under existing circumstances, could be obtained.²

41.
Reception
of the mea-
sure in the
country.

2 Ann. Reg.
1842, 53;
Mart. ii.
532.

The alteration of the duties on grain, though not the least important, was but a part of the comprehensive plan of the Prime Minister. In addition to the loud cry for the repeal of the Corn Laws, he had to face a difficulty of a still more pressing kind, arising from the deficiency of the revenue, amounting already to £2,500,000, and which, with the necessary expenses falling on this country from the Affghanistan expedition, could not be estimated at less than £4,700,000. How

42.
Financial
difficulties
of Sir R.
Peel.

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to meet this with the resources of an impoverished realm, and a people who, so far from being disposed to acquiesce in an increase, were loudly clamouring for a reduction of taxation, appeared almost an impossibility; and yet the attempt absolutely required to be made, if England would avoid descending at once from her high position in the scale of nations. Sir Robert Peel attempted it with a courage and manliness worthy of the highest admiration; and the speech with which he ushered in his important measures was one of the most remarkable of his long and brilliant career. It was on the 11th March that, in a very crowded House, and amidst breathless silence, he thus expressed himself:—¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxi. 423;
Ann. Reg.
1842, 72,
73.

43.
Sir R. Peel's
speech on
introducing
his financial
measures.

“No one can feel more strongly than I do the importance and extent of the duty that now devolves on me, and my own inadequacy to its discharge. But I should be unworthy of the trust committed to me, I should be unworthy of my place as Minister of the British Crown, if I could feel disheartened or discouraged, if I could feel anything but that buoyancy and contentedness of mind which ought to sustain every public man on entering on the discharge of a public duty—conscious that he is actuated by no motives that are not honourable and just, and feeling a deep and intimate conviction that, according to the best conclusion of his imperfect and fallible judgment, the measures which he intends to propose will be conducive to the welfare, I may say essential to the prosperity, of his country. We live in an important era of human affairs. There may be a natural tendency to overrate the magnitude of the crisis in which we live, or those particular events with which we are ourselves conversant; but I think it is impossible to deny that the period in which our lot and the lot of our fathers has been cast—the period which has elapsed since the first outbreak of the first French Revolution—has been one of the most memorable that the history of the world will afford. The course which England has pur-

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sued during that period will attract for ages to come the contemplation, and, I trust, the admiration of posterity. There will be a time when these countless millions that are sprung from our loins, occupying many parts of the globe, living under institutions different from ours, but speaking our language, will view with pride and admiration the example of constancy and fortitude which our fathers set during the momentous period of war. They will view with admiration our achievements by land and by sea, our determination to uphold the public credit, and all those qualities by which we were enabled ultimately to effect the deliverance of Europe. I am now addressing you after the duration of twenty-five years of peace. I am now exhibiting to you the financial difficulties and embarrassments in which you are placed, and my confident hope and belief is, that, following the example of those who have preceded you, you will look those difficulties in the face, and not refuse to make similar sacrifices to those which your fathers made for the purpose of upholding public credit.

“ You will bear in mind that this is no casual or occasional difficulty. You will bear in mind that there are indications among all the upper classes of increased comfort and enjoyment, of increased prosperity and wealth, and that concurrently with these indications there exists a mighty evil which has been growing up for the last seven years, and which you are now called upon to meet. You will not reconcile it to your consciences to hope for relief from diminished taxation. If you have the fortitude and constancy of which you have been set the example, you will not consent with folded arms to view the annual growth of this mighty evil. You will not adopt the miserable expedient of adding during peace, and in the midst of those indications of wealth and increasing prosperity, to the burdens which posterity will be called upon to bear. If you do permit this evil to continue, you must expect the severe but just judg-

44.
Continued.

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1842.

ment of a reflecting and retrospective posterity. Your conduct will be contrasted with that of your fathers, under difficulties infinitely less pressing than theirs ; with that of your fathers at the Mutiny at the Nore, and who, with a rebellion in Ireland and disaster abroad, submitted, with buoyant vigour and universal applause, with the Funds as low as 52, to a property-tax of 10 per cent. My confident hope and belief is, that now, when I devolve the responsibility upon you, you will prove yourselves worthy of your mission as the representatives of a mighty people ; that you will not tarnish the fame which it is your duty to cherish as the most glorious inheritance ; and that you will not impair the character for fortitude and good faith, which, in proportion as the empire of opinion supersedes and predominates over the empire of physical force, constitutes for every people, but above all for the people of England, the main instrument by which a powerful people can repel hostile aggression and maintain extended empire.

45.
continued.

“ What, then, is to be done in this emergency, when remedies of no ordinary kind must be resorted to, if power is to be maintained or bankruptcy avoided ? Indirect taxation has reached its limits, and can no longer be relied on. Last year the addition of 5 per cent on the Customs and Excise, instead of producing £5 per cent, as was expected, produced only 10s. ; while the per-centage of 10 per cent on the assessed taxes produced considerably more than was expected. Are we, then, to go back to the old taxes ? Shall we restore the postage duties ? At present, the new packet-service being added, *the Post-office produces no revenue at all, but is rather a charge* ; but the penny postage has not been long enough in operation to justify us in proposing an alteration upon it. Are the taxes to be restored upon wool, salt, and leather ? That would be adding to the burdens of the already suffering portion of the community, to the relief of that which is in affluence ; and in addi-

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tion, many new contracts have been entered into upon the faith of their abolition, and salt in particular has been applied to many new purposes. A nation's revenue may sometimes be in the end increased by reduced taxation ; but, in the first instance, it is always followed by a great diminution, and a very long time is always required to restore the amount. This principle is illustrated by what has happened with respect to the reduced duties on wine, tobacco, sugar, coffee, hemp, rum, and other articles. A mere reduction of duties, therefore, will not present a resource to meet the present emergency ; and my settled opinion, my deep conviction is, that it has become necessary to make a great appeal to the holders of property.

“ My plan is this : to levy an income-tax not exceeding 7d. in the pound, or about 3 per cent, on all incomes above £150, including all funded property, whether in the hands of natives or foreigners. I estimate the incomes of lands in Great Britain at £39,400,000 ; houses, £25,000,000 ; mines, railroads, &c., £8,400,000 ; in all, £72,800,000. The total produce of this tax, excluding Ireland, I estimate at £3,771,000. As Ireland is to be withdrawn from the tax, I propose to add 1s. a-gallon to the tax on spirits, the consumption of which is again increased from the decline of the influence of the temperance pledge. From this source I expect £250,000 a-year ; and from the equalisation of the stamp duty in that country with that in England, £160,000 more. Four shillings a-ton is to be laid on *exported* coals, from which I expect £200,000 ; in all, £4,380,000, which will cause a considerable surplus after covering the whole deficiency for the year, which I estimate at £2,500,000. And then the question remains, In what way can this surplus be best applied to improve the resources or lighten the industry of the nation ? This surplus I propose to apply in the reduction of the import duties in our commercial tariff.

46.
Continued.

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III.

842.

47.

tinued.

"The principle on which this reduction is founded is, wherever the duty is trifling, and it is practicable, to abolish it altogether; to reduce the duty on raw materials to 5 per cent, upon articles partially manufactured to 12 per cent, and even on articles entirely manufactured, to cause it not to exceed 20 per cent. On 750 articles of import there is to be an entire remission or abatement of duty; on 450 it is left untouched. The total loss of reduction on the whole would not exceed £270,000. On sugar no reduction of duty, I regret to say, is at present practicable; but on coffee a very great diminution is proposed, bringing down the duty to 8d. a-pound on foreign, and 4d. on British. On timber, regarding Canada as an integral part of the empire, and equally entitled to protection, it is proposed to make the duty merely nominal when it comes from British possessions, and 25s. a-load when from foreign states. The loss thence arising will be about £600,000 a-year.* On the whole, these reductions, with the necessary increase of expenditure, will swell the deficit to £3,700,000; but as the proposed new taxes will bring in £4,300,000, there will be a surplus of some half million to apply to the support of our distant wars.

48.
ncluded.

"I have a sincere and cordial respect for the interests which apprehend they will be affected by the reductions in the tariff; but communications with the principal parties likely to be affected by it have confirmed the Government in the opinion that these measures will be

* The duties proposed to be lowered, which excited the greatest alarm, were those which related to live cattle, sheep and swine, salted and dried meats, and on butter, eggs, cheese, and lard, and the substitution of a moderate duty on these articles. The proposed duties were:—

	Present Duty.	New Duty.
Live cattle, . . .	Prohibited.	£1 0 a-head.
Beef (salt), . . .	12s. a cwt.	0 8 a cwt.
Lard, . . .	8s. "	0 2 "
Hams, . . .	28s. "	0 14 "
Salmon, . . .	Prohibited.	0 10 "
Herrings, . . .	20s. a barrel.	0 10 "

—*Parl. Deb.* lxxiii. 367, 371.

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attended by great public advantage to all classes, not even excluding the agricultural, by the reduction which we propose to make in meat and cattle, and, above all, by removal of that complete prohibition which we found when we approached the subject. I know that many gentlemen who are strong advocates for free trade may consider that I have not gone far enough. I know that I believe that in the general principle of free trade there is now no great difference of opinion, and that *all agree in the general rule 'that we should buy in the cheapest market, and sell in the dearest.'* (Loud cheers from the Opposition.) I have stated the reasons on more than one occasion why I think the case of corn and sugar is an exception to this rule. I know that I may be met by the complaints of the gentlemen opposite as to the limited extent to which I have applied the principle to which I have adverted to these important articles. But I feel satisfied that it was inexpedient to apply such important changes as I have heard suggested to these important interests. I think it would be imprudent to increase the alarm which already prevails among these important classes. I think the Legislature has made as great a change as was prudent under the circumstances, and considering the existing relations between landlord and tenant, and the large amount of capital at present applied to the cultivation of the soil." ¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
Ixi. 450,
464, 466,
Ixi. 444,
710; Ann.
Reg. 1842,
72, 84.

No debate followed on this speech in the first instance ; and the Opposition were so much impressed with the courage and grandeur of the change proposed, that for some days the demon of faction was almost laid asleep, and it was thought the measure would pass unanimously. By degrees, however, they recovered from their consternation, and efforts were made to get up a popular agitation against the essential parts of the proposed measure. This was no difficult matter ; for although every one, of course, except the farmers, cordially acquiesced in the reduction of duties proposed by the new commercial tariff,

49.
Reception of
the plan by
the Oppo-
sition and
the country.

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yet the feeling was by no means so unanimous in favour of the proposed substitute of an income-tax. Great alarm also prevailed in the grazing districts, that the admission of foreign cattle and salted meat would prove fatal to that portion of British, and still more Irish agriculture. The proposal, too, of an income-tax, excited no small degree of alarm, especially among the middle and trading classes, who dreaded the absorption of their profits, and exposure of their affairs, especially in a time of European peace, when the necessity of so rigorous an expedient was by no means apparent. Accordingly, the Opposition saw that this was the tender point to which all their efforts should be directed, and the main struggle took place on Lord John Russell's amendment condemnatory of that tax, which came on on the 4th April, and lasted four nights. But it was favourably received in the City, especially as indicating the resolution of the Government to uphold public credit, without having recourse to a loan, which was generally apprehended, and the Funds rose from 89 to 93 in consequence.¹

Ann. Reg.
842, 376,
4, 86;
Iart. ii.
38.

50.
Argument
against the
income-
tax.

Against the tax it was urged by Lord John Russell in the Commons, and Lord Brougham in the Lords: "A direct tax on income ought never to be resorted to unless in some great emergency of public affairs—when an extraordinary expenditure has become necessary for a time, or in some pressure upon the finances of the country, which can be sustained by no other means. Such a tax ought on no account to form part of the ordinary revenue of the State, but should cease with the necessity which could alone justify its adoption; inasmuch as, besides all the other objections to which it is liable, its inquisitorial character is such as must always render it odious, however trifling may be the amount abstracted. The facility with which it is collected offers a constant temptation to extravagance on the part of Government, removes the most important check upon expenditure, and dispenses

with the necessity of seeking for an equality between income and expenditure in economy.

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51.

Continued.

“The actual state of the revenue, exhibiting a deficiency of £7,500,000 in five years, and a certain deficiency of £2,500,000 more in this year, besides probable demands from our Eastern war, may perhaps justify the imposition of an income-tax as a temporary burden, especially after the attempt to add a twentieth part to the excise and customs had only produced an increase of a two-hundredth part; yet it behoves Parliament, as the faithful guardians of the people's rights and interests, to take care that, during its temporary existence, its pressure shall be distributed in such a manner as shall make it most easily and patiently borne. In this case, it is indispensable that there should be no exemptions, not even of the highest and most exalted in the realm, of a due sense of which the Sovereign has afforded a shining example, in voluntarily offering to share the burden with the meanest of her subjects. But this alone is not enough. It is indispensable also that some distinction should be established between incomes derived from capital of any description and from mere labour, whether that labour be of the head or the hands, by levying a smaller proportion on the latter income than the former. For the same reason, it is indispensable, if we would avoid making the tax a direct confiscation, to make the rate different on persons living on annuities, salaries, and life-interests only, and those who are possessed, in addition, of the capital or stock from which it proceeds.

“These are the exemptions or limitations which justice absolutely requires if this tax is for any period, however short, to be persevered in. There are others more likely to be earnestly contended for, which are not founded in justice, and should be resisted. There should be no distinction of persons in the civil service of the State or in receipt of pensions; they should be dealt with as belong-

52.

Continued.

CHAP. ing to the class of annuitants only. It is as little con-
 XLI. sistent with justice or sound policy to make the rate
 1842. heavier upon persons of larger income than smaller, or to
 exempt any class from its operation, until you arrive at
 the class where it is not worth the expense of collecting,
 or the people are wholly unable to pay it. Unless this
 is done, not only is the tax a direct partial confiscation,
 by seizing upon the property of one class while others
 are exempt from it, but there is the greatest risk that it
 will degenerate into a perpetual burden, which all other
 classes, excepting the one burdened, have a direct interest,
 for their own benefit, in retaining upon them. The only
 way to make the tax temporary only; is to subject such
 a number of persons to its operation as to interest at all
 times a majority of the constituencies in its abolition.

53.
 Continued.

“ The tax was originally laid on as a war-tax only,
 and has never been attempted to be justified on any other
 footing. The very act which extended it to 10 per cent
 expressly declared that it ‘ should continue in force during
 the present war, and until the 6th day of April next after
 the ratification of a definitive treaty of peace, *and no
 longer.*’ Words cannot be more explicit—the faith of
 Government cannot be more strongly pledged. Accord-
 ingly, by a great effort of the nation, it was shaken off in
 1816, though Lord Castlereagh and the Government of
 the day made the greatest efforts to get it continued for
 at least a year longer, in order to wind up the expense
 of the gigantic war then terminated. But what is the
 present proposal of the Minister? It is to impose it
 during a period of profound peace, when, as the speech
 from the Throne has just informed us, her Majesty con-
 tinues to receive assurances of the most friendly disposi-
 tions from all foreign powers. To resort to the desperate
 measure of an income-tax, in such circumstances, is no-
 thing less than to proclaim to the world that your re-
 sources are exhausted, that indirect taxation has reached
 its limits, and that you are now more straitened in your

finances, in the end of a peace of twenty-five years' duration, than you formerly were in the middle of a war of nearly as long duration.

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"When Mr Pitt imposed the tax, it was to meet a deficit of £10,000,000, in the heat of a great war, which there was absolutely no other means of filling up. Is there any analogy between such a situation and the present one of this country? Your deficit is £2,500,000, about a twentieth part of your whole income. Though there has been a deficiency for some years, yet the resources of the country are unimpaired. During that time, the credit of the nation has been so high, that the Three per Cents have been at 89 and 90, and you have been able to borrow at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, while other nations have been obliged to give 5.* There is therefore nothing in the state of public credit which requires an extraordinary effort—nothing which obliges you to contradict the assertion of former Parliaments, and the declarations of all classes of politicians, that this is a tax that ought to be reserved either for times of war or difficulties with great powers, in times of peace making them equal to times of war.¹ The budget of last year will furnish funds adequate to the whole public necessities, without recurring to this odious, unjust, and inquisitorial tax, which should be

54.
Concluded.

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxii. 86,
147; Ann.
Reg. 1842,
77, 79.

* Sir R. Peel made a happy retort on this allusion to the high state of the Funds, as affording the means of meeting the public necessities without recurring to an income-tax. "If you say it is better to go on a little longer with the present system, increasing the debt a little more, funding at 91, why are the Three per Cents at 91? Who has made them 91? Public credit is high; the Funds have risen, and, say you, 'You can have a loan easily now.' Oh you miserable financiers!—(Laughter and cheers.) The Funds are high, because you have shown a disposition not to resort to loans in times of peace."—*Parl. Deb.* lii. 444.

In this debate, Sir R. Peel stated the deficiency at—

United Kingdom,	£2,570,000
India,	2,430,000
Total,	£5,000,000

while the surplus the Whigs received on entering upon office was £3,000,000.
—*Ann. Reg.* 1842, p. 89.

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reserved as a last resource for the country in periods of extreme peril and difficulty."

Lord John Russell's amendment was rejected, on the 13th April, by a majority of 308 to 202; and on the 30th May the third reading was carried by a majority of 130. In the Lords, the bill passed by a majority of 71. Notwithstanding these large majorities in both Houses, however, the change introduced great alarm into the country, especially the grazing districts, which were most threatened by the changes in the tariff. The admission of horned cattle at a duty of £1 a-head, and sheep, pigs, and salted meat at very reduced duties, naturally excited great alarm among the agriculturists, who were well aware that these animals were reared in countries where rent and wages were not a half of what they are in the British Islands. The oxen of Holstein, and the dairy produce of Holland, were particularly dreaded, and appearances for some time seemed to justify the apprehension. Butcher-meat from Hamburg was advertised at three-pence a-pound; beef and mutton fell a third in the London market; and during the panic, great numbers of graziers sold off their whole stock, in the belief that the country would be wholly supplied from foreign parts. By degrees, however, the alarm subsided; people recollected that it takes a year to make a sheep, three to form an ox; and the immediate rise of prices which ensued in the countries from which importation was chiefly dreaded, proved that the competition was not likely to be so formidable as had been apprehended. Meat, after a great fall, soon rose again to its former level of 6d. and 7d. a-pound; and the subsequent importation, though by no means inconsiderable, has not been so large as to warrant any well-grounded apprehensions that *this branch* of British agriculture is likely to suffer materially from the change. On the contrary, the evident tendency of the new tariff has been to cause the corn-lands to be thrown into grass, and render the nation dependent on foreigners,

not for its meat, but for its bread. This is exactly what took place in the last days of the Roman Empire, when Italian agriculture was destroyed by the free importation of wheat from Egypt and Libya ; but the Italian landlords still drew considerable rents from vast herds of cattle which wandered over the Ausonian plains, of which the present desolate Campagna is a remnant and an example.¹

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¹ Parl. Deb.
lxii. 444,
710; Mart.
ii. 541.

Impartial consideration, now that their effect has been tested by experience, must lead to the conclusion that these changes on the tariff introduced by Sir R. Peel were expedient, and required by the circumstances of society.

56.
Reflections
on the Tar-
riff, and
reasons for
it.

The reason is one of convincing force, though, of course, it was not alluded to by Sir R. Peel or any of his party, or indeed on either side of the House. This is, that as the price of every article of consumption had on an average been lowered at least 50 per cent by the contraction of the currency, it was essential that the money duties should be reduced at least in a similar proportion, or the burden of the import duties would be, practically seriously augmented. To have done justice to the nation, taxation of every sort should have been reduced in a similar proportion, including that which went to provide for the interest of the National Debt; but as this was impossible, it was at least something to reduce the money duties on imported articles, and thereby lower their cost in proportion to the lessened income of those who were to purchase them.

It is true, this was hard on them who lived by the production of such articles, and this at first sight seemed an injustice; but in reality it was not so. The price of labour, and of raw materials of all sorts, having been reduced also 50 per cent by the monetary changes, the cost of production was lessened to them in the same proportion. and the expense of their own living had been reduced in a similar degree. Sir R. Peel said that the income-tax of 3 per cent would be more than compensated to every person who paid it by the lessened price of every article of consumption occasioned by his tariff; and although

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there are few of the payers of the tax who will concur in that opinion, yet none can deny that a reduction of at least 50 per cent in the cost of living had been made by the monetary changes that he had introduced, which imperatively called for a corresponding reduction in the burdens with which their articles of consumption were affected.

57.
It might
have been
easily ob-
viated by
an exten-
sion of the
Currency.

This leads to a very curious reflection. The financial situation of the nation had become so serious, and the deficit so alarming, that it had overturned one Administration, and forced an entire change of commercial policy on another. The nation was steeped in misery, and indirect taxation had reached its limits; yet foreign affairs had become so threatening that a great increase of the national armaments had become indispensable. The whole experience and talent of the Legislature were taxed to the uttermost to discover a remedy for these manifold evils, and none could be thought of but recurring, in a period of profound European peace, to the grinding tax heretofore reserved as a last resource for the exigencies and dangers of war. Yet was the remedy easy, cheap, certain, injurious to no one, profitable to all. Nothing was required but to send a letter from the First Lord of the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Governors of the Bank of England, authorising the notes issued on securities to be raised from £1,000,000 to £21,000,000. Instantly despondency would have been succeeded by hope, poverty by comfort, compulsory idleness by willing industry, financial embarrassment by an overflowing treasury. Nothing but to confess a gigantic error was awaiting to repair boundless calamities, to restore happiness to a suffering realm. But to have done so required, in some, the magnanimous confession of former mistakes; in others, a surrender of, to them, a most profitable usurpation; in all, a close attention to a subject of universal interest, and but very partial comprehension. The proof of this,

however, is now decisive. Sir Robert Peel's subsequent change in 1844, without his designing it, induced such an extension of the currency as was required, though on the most perilous footing, and two years of prosperity, followed by a frightful commercial crisis, ensued. Nature gave a lasting extension on a solid foundation, by opening her reserves of gold in 1851, and unbroken prosperity has been the consequence.

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For the same reason the income-tax must be regarded, generally speaking, as a wise and just measure at the time it was imposed. The necessity for it was as great as when first proposed by Mr Pitt ; and the wars in Affghanistan and China, if less dangerous, were hardly less costly than those which had been waged with European potentates. The currency system had all turned to the advantage of realised property ; the *Times*, the great advocate for that system, boasted in the pride of its heart that it had made a sovereign worth two sovereigns. This, though a little exaggerated, was in the main true ; but as the monied interest had thus largely benefited by a system under which every other interest had essentially suffered, nothing could be more just than that it should bear the burden of the increased taxation, which that very system had rendered irrecoverable from all the other classes of the community. In a word, the monetary system was a class system of legislation designed for the benefit of the rich, and which had ended in ruining the poor ; and it had now led to its natural and just result, that of rendering class taxation unavoidable if the public revenue was to be upheld and national bankruptcy averted.

58.

The income-
tax was
justifiable.

But for the very same reason, the injustice of levying the tax at the same rate upon the wages of labour or the income of annuitants, as upon incomes derived from land or realised capital, was not merely to oppress industry by taxing a perishable at the same rate as a durable income, but to subject it to the still farther

59.

But this
made the
tax on per-
ishable in-
comes more
unjust.

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injustice of making *the sufferers under class legislation pay at the same rate as those enriched by it*—those whose incomes had been halved, as those which had been doubled by recent changes. The injustice of the double burden thus imposed upon the industrious classes was so obvious, that, had it been widespread, it must have been speedily abrogated. But it was not widespread, and therefore it was continued, and still continues. The whole persons assessed under Schedule D—that is, the professional class in Great Britain—were only 143,000, a mere trifle among 27,000,000, then forming the population of the British Islands. This handful of men were not the rich bankers or capitalists whose voice is always listened to with respect by Government; they were for the most part hard-working citizens, too few to inspire terror by their numbers, too poor to command influence by their riches.

60.
Reasons of
this injus-
tice being
committed.

The vast majority who escaped the tax because their incomes were below the line when it began, gave themselves no sort of disquiet about an injustice by which they were not affected, and rather rejoiced at a burden on others which might be the means of cheapening commodities; the holders of realised wealth in secret beheld with *satisfaction the burden imposed in such a manner upon the industrious classes as might lessen its pressure on themselves*. Thus crushed by the weight of capital, the industrious classes remained oppressed with an injustice which probably never would have been thought of but in a country subjected to class government, nor continued but in one ruled by its influences. The Ministers, assailed by arguments to which they could make no reply, contented themselves with observing that the whole income-tax was an injustice, but that such were the practical difficulties involved in the question that they could not see their way to a more equitable distribution of its burden;—the usual answer when Government is pressed with a request which they cannot assign any reason for not granting, but which

they are resolved, for some undivulged reason, not to concede. It is remarkable that, while this injustice has been perpetrated and continued for fifteen years, in a country boasting all the blessings of representative institutions, in despotic Denmark the property-tax has been arranged in so different a manner, that the only question is whether it is not unduly favourable to the middle and industrious classes.*

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1842.

If Sir R. Peel was sincere in his appeal to the holders of property to submit to a temporary burden in order to extricate the nation from the financial embarrassments in which it had become involved, he himself gave the noblest proof that he was prepared to act upon the principles which he recommended to others. On the very night (11th March) when he pronounced that eloquent appeal, he had received the accounts of the death of Sir W. Macnaghten, and the Affghanistan disaster. Veiling with heroic courage his knowledge of the calamity under a calm exterior and a serene visage, he addressed the assembly as if nothing had occurred to break the even tenor of his way, instead of intelligence having been received of the greatest disaster in British annals. The mournful events, however, could not long be concealed, and such was the anxiety of the public for information as to their details, that almost every night, for some weeks after, he was besieged with questions in the House from persons who had relatives involved in the frightful ruin. To all these questions he answered with the kindness of a father, and the resignation of a Christian; and when the moment for decision arrived, and he required openly to face the calamity and adopt measures to

61.
Peel's
heroic
conduct
on the
Affghanis-
tan disaster.

* "In Denmark the property-tax is on a graduated scale in proportion to the amount of the income enjoyed by the persons taxed, from whatever source derived. It may well be doubted whether this is not confiscation of the fortunes above the line where the heavier burden begins. But the curious thing is, that in the popular community the injustice perpetrated was on the middle class; in the despotic monarchy on the nobility and rich."—DOUBLEDAY'S *Life of Peel*, ii. 347.

meet it, he acted with the consistency of an old Roman. He openly admitted the magnitude of the disaster which had been sustained, but stated that Government were resolved to meet it in a worthy spirit, and that every effort would be made to restore victory to the British standards. This intrepid announcement was received with loud cheers from both sides of the House; reinforcements to a large extent were sent out to the armies in India, so as to raise the British forces there to 45,000 *men*; and Europe, after a disaster had been sustained, which it was generally supposed, and perhaps hoped, had finally destroyed the British power in India, beheld with astonishment preparations making to elevate it to an unprecedented pitch of grandeur.¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxii. 83,
307.

62.
Lord Ma-
hon's Copy-
right Bill.

Act 1710.

Almost unnoticed amidst the multitude of important objects which in this session crowd upon the attention, a bill was brought forward, calculated in the end to work a great and durable change on the national mind and fortunes. This was the COPYRIGHT BILL, brought forward by Lord Mahon (now Earl Stanhope), which this year was sanctioned by both Houses, and passed into law. The right of authors to the property of the written expression of their thoughts, not recognised by the common law of England when published, was the creature of statute, and by the celebrated Act of Queen Anne had been limited to fourteen years, with the addition of fourteen more if the author survived the first. This strange distinction, which in the case of works of standard merit likely to be prized by posterity, and therefore valuable to the author's family, made so great a difference in the advantages accruing to them according as he survived or did not survive a certain arbitrary time, had long been felt as unjust. It had not escaped observation, too, that the effect of limiting the copyright of authors to so short a period, had been to direct original thought and genius to works of transient popularity rather than durable utility. Impressed with these ideas, the accomplished Mr Serjeant

Talfourd had made repeated attempts to obtain for authors a further extension of the duration of copyright, and the example of Sir Walter Scott's family, which was immersed in difficulties at a time when his literary works should have yielded a splendid fortune to his descendants, was strongly founded on. The learned Serjeant's efforts, however, which were continued through three successive sessions, were unsuccessful, chiefly through the efforts of Mr Macaulay, who, strange to say, strained every nerve to defeat a measure calculated to give independence to a class of which he himself was so bright an ornament. At length, in this session, the tardy act of justice was done to literary men, and by Lord Mahon's bill the copyright was fixed at the entire life of the author, and seven years after ; or if these terms did not extend to so much, at all events to forty-two years.¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
ix. 1429,
lxi. 1397;
Pol. Dict.
i. 641.

There can be no doubt that this was a very important step in the right direction, and far more for the interests of nations than those of literary men : the beneficial effects of the change are already apparent, and are becoming more so every day. The extension of the power of reading to the great body of the people, and the great increase which has consequently taken place in the sale of publications, has indeed put an end to the degrading patronage of rank and power to genius which was felt as so painful by the authors in the time of Queen Anne, and appears so strongly in the fulsome flattery of their dedications. The public has become the great patron, and superseded all others. But the change has only enhanced the dangers to which philosophic thought and literary effort are exposed. The public is a jealous mistress, and very little experience is required to show that incessant flattery is the best passport to her favours. The servility of the press to the reigning multitude in democratic communities, is at least equal to all that ever was shown to powerful ministers or charming duchesses ;—witness the press of republican France in former

63.
Reflections
on this Act.

days, of republican America, and a large part of it in this country in these times.

This evil is of the most serious kind, and it is constantly increasing with the extension of education, and the augmentation of the number of readers; for that only multiplies the numbers to whom the flattering unction must be applied. "No man," says Goethe, "ever spoke for half an hour to a mixed audience without flattering them, that he was not thought tedious." This is not less true of writers than speakers. "Democracy," says Guizot, "has two grave faults; it aspires passionately to rule without control, and it is constantly governed by the interests and passions of the moment. To judge by the experience of the past, it is of all the social powers the most exacting and unforeseeing—that which is most jealous of limits or division of power, and also that which is most exclusively governed by present fancies, without a thought either of the past or the future."¹ The only way in which it is possible to prevent literature from falling in with and aggravating this perilous tendency in numerous and highly-educated communities, is to give authors *an interest in the approbation of future times*, and thereby emancipate them from the dominion of the present. Unless this is done, the standard literature of the country, like the daily or monthly press, will be entirely devoted to inflaming the passions and aggravating the prejudices of the moment. Truth is always distasteful in the outset of its career to the majority: witness the reception of the discovery of the motions of the earth by Galileo, of the circulation of the blood by Harvey, of the system of the heavens by Copernicus and Newton. The Cross itself, which was to save the world, was borne in pain and sorrow by our Saviour: "Crucify him! crucify him!" was the universal cry. So different is the first impulse of the multitude from the ultimate conclusions of reason. No state of things can be conceived more perilous; and if it is of long

Extension
of the dan-
gers of lit-
erature.

¹ Guizot,
Sir R. Peel,
353.

continuance, it may come to give awful meaning to the banishment of mankind from paradise in consequence of eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. But as certainly as prejudice and passion govern mankind in regard to the present, so reason and truth prevail in the end. "*Magna est veritas et prævalebit*" is a maxim of universal truth and application; and the only way to prevent it, to rule in the end the thoughts of men, is to give authors a durable interest in the publication of their thoughts, and thereby relieve them from the necessity of flattering only present passions or interests.

In January 1841, Mr O'Connell said at a meeting of the Repeal Association in Ireland, "I shall for my part vote for the Whigs to keep them in; but I tell them honestly and firmly they have lost altogether the hearts of the Irish people, and nothing but the LOUD CRY FOR REPEAL shall henceforth be heard among us. I did not resume the repeal agitation till I saw how utterly unable the Whigs were to effect anything." The first step in this movement was to collect money, the sinews of war, and this was done in a very curious way, highly characteristic of the ascendant which O'Connell and the priesthood had acquired over the entire Catholic population. The sum paid in Ireland for ardent spirits, not less than from £4,000,000 to £5,000,000 annually, presented a fund of vast amount, and perfectly equal to the necessities of the case, if any considerable part of it could be realised. Great as was the influence of the Agitator with his countrymen, however, this was effected to a most surprising degree by supplanting one passion by another—the desire for drink by the thirst for independence. To divert the funds hitherto wasted in the public-house into the coffers of the Repeal Association was the great object, and this was done by a movement veiled under the guise of philanthropy, which for a time was attended with surprising success. The *temperance* movement began. Father Mathew, a monk of ardent

disposition, nervous eloquence, and enthusiastic philanthropy, soul of the movement. The benevolent ~~man~~ was the unsuspecting hand by which the ~~laundic~~ hierarchy carried on their projects of converting the surplus funds of Irish labour to the purposes of repeal agitation. The effect of his heart-stirring eloquence was at first prodigious; it recalled the days when Peter the Hermit roused the dormant energies of Europe in behalf of the Holy Land. Multitudes rushed forward everywhere to take the temperance pledge from the hands of the great apostle of sobriety. Fifty thousand met him here, forty thousand there; his journeys resembled rather the progress of a mighty conqueror than the movements of a humble priest bent only on an errand of mercy. Such was the enthusiasm excited, so general the transports, that the consumption of spirits in Ireland fell off in one year from 10,000,000 to 3,000,000 gallons, and no small part of the embarrassment of the English treasury arose from the sudden temperance of the people of Ireland.¹

¹ Mart. ii. 296, 297; Hall's Ireland, ii. 36, iii. 60; Ann. Reg. 1839, 248, Chron.

66.
Progress
and decline
of the move-
ment.

It has often been remarked, that whenever the people give over *fighting at fairs* in Ireland, you may be sure that some serious outbreak is in contemplation, and Government will do well to stand on their guard. Never was this truth more clearly demonstrated than on the present occasion. The effect of the taking of the temperance pledge by two millions of men in the first instance was immense. Serious crime rapidly diminished, as it will always do when by any means a check is given, even for a time, to the dreadful passion for ardent spirits. The judges everywhere congratulated the grand juries on the lightness of the calendar; predial outrages declined, and the philanthropic and inexperienced began to indulge the pleasing hope that, by the zeal of a benevolent friar, an antidote had at length been discovered for the most demoralising social corruption of civilised man. It must be confessed that the returns of crime in Ireland for some years seemed to justify the anticipation. Convictions decreased

from 12,000 in 1839 to 8000 in 1844.* But all these movements, originating in sudden conversion, not lasting changes of habit, are merely temporary in their operation, and not unfrequently are followed by a reaction which renders matters worse than they had been before the change commenced. When the political and sacerdotal objects for which the movement had been set on foot had ceased, and the repeal agitation had failed, the temperance movement came to an end, and was succeeded by the darkest era ever known of Irish suffering and crime. The reaction in favour of whisky became as strong as the movement in favour of temperance ever had been. The annual consumption of spirits rose again to 12,000,000 gallons, and with it, aided by the terrible calamities of 1846 and 1847, swelled the rolls of crime to an unprecedented amount.¹ †

¹ Mart. ii.
296, 297;
Porter, 663;
Ann. Reg.
1840, 621.

It soon appeared to what purpose the large funds rendered available by the temperance movement, while it lasted, were to be turned by the Irish agitators. No sooner did it appear that the fate of the Whigs was sealed, and that Sir Robert Peel was to succeed to the helm, than his support of the Government ceased, and O'Connell commenced a *guerre à mort* against England and everything belonging to it. His first move was to endeavour to exclude English manufactures from the country; but that attempt soon failed among a people for the most

67.
Commence-
ment of the
Repeal agi-
tation.

Years.	Committed in Ireland.	Convicted
* 1839,	26,392	12,049
1840,	23,833	11,194
1841,	20,796	9,287
1842,	21,186	9,874
1843,	20,126	8,620
1844,	19,446	8,042
1845,	16,696	7,101

PORTER'S *Progress of the Nation*, 668.

Years.	Committed in Ireland.	Convicted.
† 1846,	18,492	8,639
1847,	31,209	15,233
1848,	38,528	18,206
1849,	41,489	21,202

PORTER, 668.

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XLI.

1842.

part possessing no manufactures, and invariably so poor as the Irish. His next step was a well-devised one, and was attended with important consequences. He converted the Precursors' Association into a new one styled the REPEAL ASSOCIATION; and thenceforward his whole efforts were directed to further its objects. The organisation of the Association was the same as that which had proved so successful in bringing about Catholic emancipation. It consisted of associates, members, and volunteers. A card was given to each person entering, which served the purpose of mutual recognition without expressly violating the law against pass-words and signs. Each of these associates paid 1s. on entering and getting his ticket. The next class was the members, and they paid £1 each on entering, or engaged to obtain twenty associates at 1s. each. The members received each a card, on which were inscribed prints of four of the principal places where the Irish had been successful in combating either the English or the Danes. At the top of the card was a roll or script, on which were inscribed the words, "Resolved unanimously that the claims of any body of men, other than the King, Lords, and Commons of *Ireland*, to make laws to bind this kingdom, are unconstitutional, illegal, and a grievance.—DUNGANNON VOLUNTEERS, 15th February 1782." The Association was governed by general inspectors, repeal wardens, and collectors; and it was their duty to collect the subscriptions for the repeal cause, and transmit them to the central Association in Dublin, where they formed a fund which soon became so celebrated under the name of *the Rent*. With such zeal did the wardens and collectors discharge their duties, that the rent ere long reached £3000 a-week; and O'Connell boasted, in the pride of his heart, that he had two millions of repealers under his banners!¹

¹ Spectator, 1841, 28, 29, 272, 344, 466; Ann. Reg. 1843, 225, 226; Mart. ii. 562, 563.

The plan of operations concocted between this consummate master of the art of agitation and his confederate chiefs, was, not to break out into open rebellion, but to

approach it as closely as possible, and intimidate Government by the display of numbers. For this purpose, meetings on a gigantic scale were to be held in all parts of the country where they were likely to be successful, to which the people were to be collected by the wardens, priests, and collectors in the different parishes. The temperance chiefs were, for the most part, enrolled in this ulterior movement; and the detachments from the different parishes generally mustered, preceded by the temperance bands. When Sir R. Peel's return to power in May 1841 was evident, simultaneous meetings were held in every parish of Ireland, to implore the Queen "not to receive into her confidence the bitter and malignant enemies of her faithful Irish people." The people came in companies, led by their priests, and preceded by the temperance bands, often a distance of ten or fifteen miles, and marched back the same day. The enthusiasm thus excited was indescribable; all hearts were stirred, all understandings swept away by it. A bed-ridden old woman was carried ten miles "to seek salvation for her country." The numbers collected on these occasions, though much exaggerated by the repeal press, were undoubtedly immense. At a meeting on the Hill of Kilnoe, in the county of Clare, in May 1841, it was said that 100,000, and probably really 50,000 were present. These meetings, which were generally addressed by O'Connell in person, were held through the whole of 1841, and though intermitted in 1842, from a doubt whether Sir R. Peel's Ministry would not be swept away, and the Liberal Government restored by the Anti-Corn-Law agitation, yet they were renewed with fresh vigour in 1843, and soon acquired the most formidable consistency.¹

CHAP.
XLI.

1843.

68.
Monster
meetings.¹ Spectator,
1841, 466,
582; Ann.
Reg. 1843,
225, 227;
Mart. ii.
563.

As these meetings generally consisted of thirty, forty, or fifty thousand persons, it may readily be believed that it was impossible that any voice, how powerful soever, could be heard by such prodigious multitudes. But this difficulty, apparently insurmountable, was got over by a

69.
Character
of these
meetings,
and lan-
guage used
at them.

CHAP.
XLI.

1843.

very simple device. A number of wardens were stationed in concentric circles round the hustings from which O'Connell addressed them, and they repeated what he said with stentorian lungs, until the re-echo reached the farthest extremity of the crowd, and next morning the whole speech was published by the newspapers. The character of his addresses may be judged of by the following extract from a speech delivered at Trim, on March 15, 1843 : " When I think of the multitudes that surround me ; when I see the bright eye and hardy look which belong to Irishmen beyond any people upon earth, I ask you, ' Will you be slaves ? ' You will answer, ' No ; ' and I reply, ' I shall either be in my grave or a freeman.' You can expect nothing from the English Parliament : idle sentiments will not now do : I call on you to act at once : make your choice either to be freemen or slaves.

' Hereditary bondsmen, know ye not,
Who would be free, himself must strike the blow ! ' "

Aug. 15.

And at an immense meeting held at Tara, so famous in Irish song, on 15th August 1843, he said, amidst thunders of applause : " I was laughed at in January because I said this would be the repeal year : does any one laugh now ? It is my turn now to make merry. I am now able positively to announce to you that before twelve months are over, a Parliament will be held in College Green, Dublin, and the hurrahs for repeal will be heard over all the land. The Duke of Wellington began by threatening us : he does not talk of this now ; he is getting loopholes made in the old barracks ; he is preparing to stand a siege—as if we were going to break our heads against stone walls ! The Queen will call the Parliament : we will march ^{to} College Green with law and order inscribed on our banners. I shall have all the teetotallers *with me : they are the finest effluence of human wishes : there is not an army in the world that I would not fight with them.*" And the unanimous adhesion of the clergy to

the repeal movement was declared by the Rev. Dr Higgins, the Roman Catholic bishop of Armagh, who said at a dinner held at Mullingar, on *Sunday*, 14th May 1843—"I formally announce to you that *all the bishops of Ireland have formally declared themselves repealers*, and that from shore to shore we are all such. (Immense applause.) I defy all the ministers of England to put down the agitation in the county of Armagh. If they beset our temples, and mix our people with spies, we will prepare our people for the circumstances; and if they bring us for that to the scaffold, in dying in behalf of our country, we will bequeath our wrongs to our successors. (Enthusiastic cheers.)"¹

CHAP.
XLI.
1843.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1843, 226,
229, 231;
Mart. ii.
366, 367;
Spectator,
1843, 301,
301.

While meetings attended by forty and fifty thousand persons were almost weekly addressed by inflammatory addresses of this description, and the peasantry, instead of attending to their business, neglected the land, and were hurrying from one crowded meeting to another, Government looked on with apparently supine indifference, and even seemed to favour the agitation. Large bodies of police and military were always in attendance, but out of sight of the assembled crowds, so as to avoid any collision with the people. No prosecutions were instituted either against the orators who spoke treason, or the newspapers which printed it. One indication of vigour alone was given by Government, which was the carrying of an "Arms Act," whereby it was rendered necessary for the possessors of arms to have them registered, branded by an officer appointed for the purpose, and a small license taken out for them. It was evident that this measure was absolutely necessary for the preservation of life and property in Ireland, and it did not differ materially from the bill introduced by Lord Morpeth in 1838; but nevertheless it was made the subject of violent party conflict in the House, and was opposed by the whole strength of the united Liberal and Catholic parties. Introduced on the 29th May, it was so obstinately resisted that it did not get through the Commons till the 9th August; but it went

70.
Measures
of Govern-
ment, and
Arms Bill.
Aug. 22.

CHAP.
XLI.

1843.

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxi. 470;
Ann. Reg.
1843, 248,
250.

rapidly through the Lords, and became law at the very end of the session, on the 22d of the same month. But meanwhile, under the skilful directions of the Duke of Wellington, preparations were making in every direction for a serious conflict. The smaller posts were generally abandoned, and the troops concentrated in the larger ones, which were barricaded and loopholed, and every preparation made for a vigorous defence against the attacks which were hourly apprehended.¹

71.
The Clontarf meeting is stopped, and O'Connell arrested.
Oct. 8.

The reason why the Government, to the surprise of all Europe, remained so long quiescent under the tremendous agitation which was now in every quarter convulsing Ireland, was, that they were desirous not to strike till they had a fair prospect of a conviction of the leaders of the movement—an event which, with the English law requiring unanimity in juries, and the divided state of the country, was by no means probable. Canada had recently afforded a memorable example of the embarrassment arising from an accumulation of prisoners whose guilt was evident, but whom no jury would convict. At length, however, Sir R. Peel deemed the moment for action had arrived, and the blow struck was decisive. The repealers, relying on their long impunity, had now almost thrown off the mask, and talked openly of their “repeal cavalry and infantry,” of marching and countermarching. The language constantly used was now, “Repeal or Blood;” and the crowds swore to “live or die for O'Connell.” Preparations were making for a monster meeting on the greatest scale at Clontarf, when a proclamation was suddenly issued by the Lord-Lieutenant forbidding the meeting, and calling upon all well-disposed persons to abstain from attending it. The proposed place of meeting was occupied at daylight by large bodies of cavalry and infantry, which were strongly supported by reserves in Dublin; the guns of the Pigeon-house Fort were turned on the road leading from Dublin to Clontarf; the hustings were removed; all persons coming to the meeting turned back; and six thousand men in all assem-

bled to support the majesty of the law. The Repeal Association immediately yielded. Parties were sent out in all directions to warn away and disperse the people, and the meeting was stopped. This was followed by the arrest of O'Connell and the leaders of the Repeal Association, which took place a few days after, on a charge of conspiracy, sedition, and unlawful assembling.¹

CHAP.
XLI.

1844.
Oct. 14.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1843, 229,
237; Spec-
tator, 1843,
965.

The trials came on in the beginning of November, and every effort was made from the very first to obstruct the proceedings by every legal means, and to strain every nerve to intimidate and overawe both the grand and petty jury. Objections were made at every step to the proceedings; and with such success were the efforts of the repealers attended, that a great proportion of the jurymen paid the fine of £50 to avoid serving. At length the objections in point of form were overruled, and the petty jury was sworn. O'Connell came to the bar in the lord mayor's carriage, followed by twenty-three other carriages filled with his friends. The opening speech of the Attorney-General was very powerful, and made a great impression, unfolding as it did a series of proceedings which recalled the Rebellion of 1798, and left no doubt on any one's mind that a crisis of the same description was at hand. The public anxiety rose to the highest pitch as the proceedings drew to their close; but no words can describe the sensation which was felt when the foreman of the jury returned with a verdict finding all the accused guilty of some of the counts in the indictment. A yell arose in the court, which was echoed through all the streets and lanes adjoining, when the verdict was known, which froze every heart with horror. Mr Smith O'Brien, a gentleman of family and fortune, who afterwards obtained an unenvied celebrity in Ireland, generously came in with O'Connell when he was to hear judgment; a courageous step at such a moment, which deservedly excited the enthusiasm of all present. Sentence was not pronounced till the 30th

72.
Trial and
conviction
of O'Con-
nell.
Jan. 15,
1844.

CHAP.
XLI.

1844.
May 30.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1843, 238,
239—1844,
337; Law
Cases, Spec-
tator, 1844,
154; Mart.
ii. 572.

May, and by it O'Connell was ordered to a year's imprisonment, to pay a fine of £2000, and to find security under heavy recognisances to keep the peace for seven years to come. The other persons accused were fined £50 each, and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. Mr O'Connell was allowed to choose his own place of confinement, and he selected the Richmond penitentiary, to which he was immediately conveyed. The judge (Burton) who pronounced sentence was so much affected that he could scarcely discharge his duty.¹

73.
Reversal of
the sen-
tence.

The news of O'Connell's conviction spread like wild-fire over Ireland, and produced a prodigious sensation. Bale-fires were lighted up on all the hills, and there was at first some talk of a general rising; but this was forbidden by O'Connell, who issued a proclamation enjoining the people to keep the peace for six or at most twelve months, and they would have a parliament in College Green. He was permitted to see his friends in confinement, but not to receive deputations; and it was soon apparent that his power had received a death-blow. His alleged invincibility was at an end; the determination of Government at length to terminate the agitation, and strike at the guilty party, had been made manifest; and after so flagrant a proof of the erroneous nature of his predictions regarding himself, men no longer trusted those of which he was so profuse regarding his country. Sunday, 7th July, was appointed as a day for a general prayer in all the Catholic chapels of Ireland in behalf of O'Connell; but there was an ominous difference among the spiritual authorities regarding it. The Archbishop of Dublin interdicted the prayer in his province, and it was only partially obeyed in the rest of Ireland. Meanwhile an appeal against the sentence was presented first to the Queen's Bench in Ireland, and next to the House of Peers in England. The sentence was affirmed by the former, but the issue was different with the latter. The

case was referred, according to usual custom, to the twelve judges for their opinion ; and though they were unanimous in pronouncing the findings of the jury on six out of the eleven counts in the indictment to be bad from not returning a correct answer to the charges, yet, by a majority of seven to two, they held that enough which was unobjectionable remained in the verdict to sustain the sentence. With this opinion in favour of the conviction, the case returned to the House of Peers, and then the result was different. The lay lords, with great propriety, abstained from voting, and the case was left to the law lords. These were Lord-Chancellor Lyndhurst, Lords Denman, Cottenham, Campbell, and Brougham. Three of them overruled the opinion of the twelve judges, and held the objections insurmountable ; two—Lords Lyndhurst and Brougham—adhered to the opinion of the majority of the judges. The result was, that the sentence was quashed, and the accused all set at liberty.¹

CHAP.
XLI.
1844.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1844, 337 ;
Law Cases ;
Spectator,
1844, 841,
845.

Leaving it to English lawyers to determine in point of law between these conflicting authorities, and to say whether the opinion of Lords Lyndhurst and Brougham, and the seven English judges, or that of the three Whig law lords and the two judges be the better founded, one thing is perfectly clear, that never was a more magnificent exhibition of British justice exhibited than on this occasion, and never a step taken attended with more beneficial effect in stilling the agitation of the neighbouring country. O'Connell was now at the mercy of the assembly he had so long vilified and reviled ; nothing was required but for three of the numerous peers who were in attendance behind the Woolsack awaiting the issue to step forward and take a part in the vote, and the thing was done. They did not do so ; they yielded to the scruples, perhaps too critically conceived, of the three law lords, and allowed the great Agitator to issue, apparently, a triumphant

74.
Effects of
this deci-
sion.

CHAP. martyr from prison, rather than violate, even in the most
XLI. trifling matters of form, the strictest principles of British
1844. justice. Every one saw that O'Connell was really guilty—
that he owed his liberation to a minute technical diffi-
culty ; but this difficulty was given effect to by the
highest Saxon court, composed almost entirely of political
opponents, upon whom he had heaped every epithet of
abuse which the English language could afford. The
moral effect of this was great. If the victory in legal
niceties was with O'Connell, that in opinion and justice
was with the House of Peers ; and he never afterwards
regained his position in public estimation, for he had
been caught in his own toils, and liberated from them by
the hand of his enemies.

75.
His subse-
quent career
and death.
May 15,
1847.

His subsequent career was short, and deserves to be
noticed only as the closing scene in the life of one who
had so long held so prominent a position in the public
eye. He was indulged with a triumphal procession from
jail when the reversal of the sentence was communicated
to him, and an immense crowd assembled to witness his
departure and attend him home ; but it was already
evident that his influence was on the wane. The
year of liberation passed without a parliament being as-
sembled in College Green—and the next, and the next.
Men began to throw in his teeth the non-accomplish-
ment of his promises ; the credulity even of the Irish
peasantry began to yield to the repeated disappointment
of their hopes. He was never formidable again ; and he
had the misfortune, before he died, of seeing himself passed
in the career of popularity by younger, more audacious,
and less experienced men. “Young Ireland” reproached
him with having “surrendered,” when, on the return of
the “base, bloody, and brutal Whigs” to power in 1846, he
was reinstated in the commission of the peace, and sup-
ported the Russell Ministry in Parliament. Symptoms
of internal disease and approaching dissolution ere long

appeared. His eye became heavy, his countenance fell, his step, once so firm and elastic, waxed feeble and tremulous. By the advice of his physicians he went abroad ; but he experienced no material benefit from change of scene, or the respect with which he was received by the Catholic authorities ; and having reached Genoa, he expired there on 15th May 1847. After his death his reputation rapidly sank, and among none so completely as those who had so long worshipped his footsteps. It was essentially injured in the estimation of the world in general, by the revelations made by the Government commissioners sent down to investigate the condition of Ireland during the famine which so soon after ensued, to the effect that the Liberator who had uttered so many eloquent declamations on the wrongs of Ireland, was himself a grinding middleman, who exacted three times as much from his starving tenantry as he himself paid for the land to his overlord. His reputation sank so rapidly, that at a sale of his effects, which took place in Dublin some years after, a bust of the great Liberator only brought sixpence.¹

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XLI.
1844.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1844, 95,
Chron.;
Letters of
Times' Cor-
respondent,
530; Letters
from Genoa,
May 16,
1847; Mart.
ii. 574, 575.

The general distress continued unabated during the first six months of 1843 ; but towards the close of the year symptoms of decided amendment began to appear. This was probably in some degree owing to the impulse given to trade by Sir R. Peel's tariff, but much more was to be ascribed to the increased bounty of nature, which now began to be as benign as for the five preceding years she had been rigorous. The "long, long summer" of 1842 still lives in the recollection of those who had been warmed by its sunshine, as much as the terrible winters of 1838 and 1839 live in their gloomy remembrance. The autumn of that year was peculiarly fine ; during the whole of August and September scarce a drop of rain fell, and the harvest was not only abundant, but, what is of almost equal importance in these

76.
Fine harvest
of 1842, and
gradual im-
provement
in the coun-
try in 1843.

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1843.

northern latitudes, was got in in excellent order. The effect was soon apparent. Never was seen more clearly the dependence of man upon Supreme Power, and the superior efficacy of Divine blessings to all the efforts of man in drying up the springs of public distress. The price of wheat, which in 1841 had been 63s., fell in 1842-43 to 49s. ; and the importation of foreign wheat, which in the former year had been 2,403,000 quarters, sunk in the latter to 1,606,000, and in the succeeding one to 476,000 quarters.* The effect of this happy change was great in itself ; food was rendered comparatively cheap to the working classes, and the pressure of that terrible combination under which they had so long suffered, of low wages arising from commercial depression, and high prices of grain arising from bad seasons, was sensibly alleviated. But important as these effects were, they yet yielded in importance to the effects of the change on the currency, and through it on the credit and commercial enterprise of the nation. The progressive decline of imports of foreign wheat from nearly 3,000,000 quarters to less than 500,000 yearly, took off the great drain on the coffers of the Bank, which had so long taken place, to pay for it. The stock of bullion proportionally increased, and with it the issue of its notes, and the credit, industry, and prosperity of the country. The bullion in the Bank, which in October 1839 had been as low as £2,546,000, and in 1840 was only £3,900,000, progressively rose with the diminution of imports of grain, till in 1843 it stood at £11,200,000, and in March 1844 was as high as £16,100,000.¹ The notes in circulation underwent a

¹ Report of Committee on Banks of Issue, 1841; Tooke on Prices, iv. 436, 441.

* PRICES AND IMPORTATIONS OF WHEAT.

Years.	Quarters.	Price.
1841-2,	2,985,422	63s. 4d.
1842-3,	2,405,217	49s. 4d.
1843-4,	1,606,902	53s. 9d.
1844-5,	476,190	46s. 7d.

TOOKE *On Prices*, iv. 415.

similar increase, having advanced from £15,500,000 in 1840, to £22,000,000 in 1844.*

The effects of this marked diminution in the import of grain, and increase in the issue of notes, were very great upon prices, and the trade and industry of the country. Prices, indeed, of all the articles of manufactured produce, did not as yet rise ; but imports and exports increased, speculation revived, and that deplorable combination of high prices of food with low rates of manufacturing wages, the inevitable result in bad seasons of a currency dependent on the retention of gold, for the time entirely ceased. The increased imports of cotton and other large materials for manufacture, indicated the augmented activity of the employers ; while the great augmentation of the humbler articles of luxury, the consumption of which indicated their well-being, afforded a gratifying proof that prosperity was at length, after a long and dreary interval, descending to the cottages of the poor.† The effect upon the general exports and imports of the kingdom, and the revenue, was visible and striking,

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XLI.

1843.

77.

(General improvement in the country.

* BULLION IN THE BANK, AND NOTES IN CIRCULATION.

		Bullion.	Notes out.
Jan. 1840,	.	£4,500,000	£15,500,000
„ 1841,	.	4,000,000	15,600,000
„ 1842,	.	5,600,000	16,100,000
„ 1843,	.	10,600,000	18,600,000
„ 1844,	.	15,200,000	19,500,000
Feb. 1845,	.	16,100,000	22,000,000

—TOOKE *On Prices*, iv. 437, 441.

† IMPORTS OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES FROM 1839 TO 1844 INCLUSIVE.

Years.	Cotton. lb.	Silk. lb.	Hemp. cwt.	Wool. lb.	Sugar. cwt.	Coffe. lb.	Tobacco. lb.
1839	389,396,000	4,788,738	995,603	57,379,000	4,678,000	41,003,000	35,605,000
1840	502,488,000	4,459,542	684,068	49,438,000	4,035,000	70,271,000	36,880,000
1841	487,992,000	4,734,755	652,165	56,170,000	4,908,000	43,317,000	43,935,000
1842	531,750,000	5,388,100	585,905	45,982,000	4,756,000	41,444,000	39,526,000
1843	673,193,000	4,964,203	735,743	49,243,000	5,020,000	38,942,000	43,775,000
1844	646,111,000	5,899,187	913,233	65,713,000	4,880,075	46,523,000	37,610,000

—TOOKE'S *History of Prices*, iv. 435.

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especially towards the close of 1843 and during the whole of 1844, when a great increase took place;* and the increase of the revenue, coupled with the produce of the income-tax, which instead of £3,441,000, as Sir R. Peel had calculated, proved to be £5,400,000, exhibited an equally gratifying proof of reviving public prosperity.

78.
Parliamentary measures of 1843. Lord Ashley's Bills for Infant Labour.

The parliamentary session of 1843 was not characterised by any measures of very great importance. So great had been the change, both in finance and commercial policy, introduced in the preceding year, that men stood still, as it were, in anxious and silent expectation of the event, and trusting for the introduction of important measures to the all-powerful Minister by whom so many had been already introduced. Such measures as were brought in related chiefly to the alleviation of that suffering which had prevailed during so many painful years, and was only towards the close of the year beginning to be alleviated. Of the many evils which that long and mournful period introduced, not the least was the almost universal use of infant labour, which had been in a measure forced upon the working classes in the manufacturing districts by the deplorable destitution to which they had so long been reduced. The infants in the mineral and manufacturing districts in an especial manner stood in need of legislative protection, for there the workshop and the mine stood in fearful competition with

* EXPORTS AND IMPORTS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

Years.	Imports. Official Value.	Exports. Declared Value.	Revenue.
1839	£62,004,000	£53,233,580	£47,844,000
1840	67,432,964	51,406,430	45,567,565
1841	64,377,962	51,634,629	48,937,397
1842	65,204,729	47,381,023	48,580,026
1843	70,093,353	52,278,449	52,582,817†
1844	85,281,958	58,584,292	54,003,754

† Income-tax.

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1843.

the domestic hearth and the school; and even the best disposed parents were forced to send their children to work at a very early period of life, in order to add to the scanty earnings of the family. Struck with these evils, but unhappily still blind to the real cause to which they were owing, a philanthropic and energetic nobleman, whose life has been devoted to the amelioration of the poor, brought in a bill in 1842 for a committee to inquire into the employment of women and children in mines and collieries: Government acceded to the motion, and the committee was appointed. The evidence which they collected was of so startling and horrible a kind that it led to the bill, which he introduced on the report of the committee, passing both Houses with very little opposition, except from the mineral proprietors immediately interested. By this Act the employment of females in mines was absolutely prohibited in all cases; that of boys was limited to ten years of age and upwards, and inspectors were appointed to see the Act carried into full execution. This change was severely felt at the time, as tending to throw a number of hard-working women and children out of employment, and in the first instance it augmented rather than relieved the distress in that branch of industry. Yet was the change loudly called for, and in the end beneficial; for it put an immediate stop to a practice, a remnant of savage times, which utterly brutified and demoralised women; and it protected in some degree the class in the community which stood most in need of the shield of the Legislature—infant children employed in underground labour, withdrawn from the sight and sympathy of the great body of the community.¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxv. 1097;
Mart. ii.
554, 555.

Encouraged by this success, Lord Ashley brought forward a motion for an address to the Queen for a general system of religious education for the working classes, and this was followed up by a bill, introduced by Sir James Graham, for the better regulation and education of factory children. By this bill it was proposed

79.
Sir James
Graham's
unsuccessful
Factory and
Education
Bill.

C. AP.
ALL.
1843.

that no children between the ages of six and thirteen should work more than six and a half hours ; that they should be obliged to attend schools appointed for the purpose ; and that the children of Catholics and Dissenters should be committed for so many hours in each week to religious teachers, according to the creed of their respective parents. The measure was to include pauper children at factories, and the children of all persons, whether paupers or not, whom their parents chose to send to the school, whether they were factory children or not. There was to be seven trustees to each school under the Act, three of whom were to be the clergyman of the district and two of his churchwardens ; the other four elected by the ratepayers. The bill, which was evidently founded on the right principles on the subject, met with very general support in the House of Commons ; and the Queen's reply to the address presented to her on the subject was very cordial. But difficult in the extreme are all attempts at beneficent legislation in matters where sectarian zeal or sacerdotal ambition deem themselves interested. The Dissenters took fright at the composition of the boards of parish trustees, even though the larger proportion of them were to be elected by the ratepayers, of whom they boasted that they possessed a majority ; and such was the clamour raised on the subject, and the multitude of petitions which flowed in from the efforts of the Dissenters, that Sir James Graham, with expressions of extreme regret, was obliged to withdraw, first the educational clauses, and at last the whole bill.¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxvii. 354,
422, lxviii.
1103, lxix.
1568.

80.
New Fac-
tory Bill,
and Lord
Ashley's
Ten-hours'
amendment.

Next session Sir James Graham, taught by experience the extreme danger of meddling, in the most remote degree, even for the most salutary and beneficial purposes, with institutions which rouse sectarian jealousy or solicitude, introduced a bill which, without any educational clauses at all, professed simply and solely to limit the undue working of the operatives, whether male or

female, in future. The fate of this bill was very curious, and strongly illustrative of the varying and antagonistic influences which had now come to bear on the House of Commons. When the bill was sent to the committee, Lord Ashley moved an amendment, by which the working hours of women and young persons under fourteen years of age were to be reduced from twelve to ten hours a-day. Sir James Graham opposed this with reluctance and pain, on the ground that the change was too violent; that the limiting the hours of women and children would necessarily draw after it that of adults also; and that thus the change would come to reduce the hours, and of course the produce, of labour in factories by a sixth, and put in hazard the subsistence of two millions of persons. There was some truth, but great exaggeration, in these statements, to which O'Connell lent the additional weight of his powerful voice, which declared, that if the amendment became law, "Manchester would become a tomb." Notwithstanding these sinister predictions, the amendment was carried by Lord Ashley in the Commons by a majority of *nine*, the numbers being 272 to 263. This was considered a serious defeat to ministers, as the amendment had been opposed by their whole strength, and great efforts were accordingly made to get the veto rescinded. They succeeded in doing so by a majority of *seven* in a subsequent stage of the bill, and immediately before, they had by a majority of three negatived the proposal of twelve hours. Government, seeing the House thus vacillating, hinted in no obscure terms that they would withdraw the bill; and Lord Ashley upon this gave way, and moved the adoption of eleven hours in all cases, as a reasonable compromise for three years, and ten hours after that time. After a long and interesting debate, the bill as amended was carried, the substitution of ten for eleven hours being rejected by a majority of 138.¹ It was not seriously opposed in the House of Lords, and became law without

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxii. 277,
lxxiii. 1073,
1101, 1110,
1263, lxxiv.
1460, 1463,
lxxv. 915,
1104.

CHAP. any educational clauses ; affording a melancholy proof
 XLI. of the prevalence of sectarian over philanthropic views
 1843. in the religious, and of considerations of gain over
 those of humanity in the worldly portion of the commu-
 nity.

81.
 Reflections
 on this sub-
 ject.

In reflecting on this important question, there is one consideration of paramount importance, to which the public are now only beginning to open their eyes, but without a due regard to which, all legislation on the subject will be evaded and become inoperative. This is, that such is the inversion of the feelings of nature which takes place in manufacturing and mining districts, and such the straits to which, from the vicissitudes of commerce, the persons engaged in them are reduced, that the worst enemies of children are often *their own parents*, and all attempts at general education are elusory, unless due provision is made to guard against the fatal precocity of labour. In agricultural pursuits, the severity and strength required in the toil is in general a sufficient protection to children against the oppression of infant labour ; but in manufactories and collieries the case is different,—*something can be extracted from the employment of the young even in their earliest years. From seven upwards the work of a child is worth something—often as much as four or five shillings a-week. No strength is required to watch a wheel, or pour out oil, or open a valve. The workshop stands in fearful competition with the school.** Education in general is not wholly neglected, but it is given in so imperfect a manner, or to so small an extent, that it is of scarcely any benefit in life. The inevitable contagion of vice from the assemblage of numbers, the facilities afforded for the indulgence of precocious passion, by the young of both sexes being constantly

* So general is the operation of this cause, that it has been ascertained by recent statistical researches, that in Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Bolton, and other manufacturing towns, the proportion of children at school to the entire population is only 4 or 5 per cent, or 1 in 20 or 25, whereas in Prussia it is 1 in 10 ; in Austria, 1 in 9 ; in Canada, 1 in 7.

together, counteract all the incipient benefits of education. Hence the vast proportion of the criminals who turn out to be persons "imperfectly educated," and the astounding fact, that the persons convicted by a jury or summarily in England, are now a hundred thousand in a year, being about 1 in 180 of the population. Unless the employment of children in mines and manufactories is *absolutely prohibited below fourteen years of age*, all attempts to educate generally the manufacturing and mining population will prove, generally speaking, nugatory and useless.

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1843.

The year 1843, however, was marked by a succession of riots in an entirely rural portion of Great Britain, which proved that the seeds of evil were not sown only in the manufacturing and mining districts, but that, unless local grievances were looked to and redressed, the country might become as disturbed in the agricultural, as it had ever been in the worst parts of Ireland. Loud complaints had long been made of the heavy tolls paid, especially on the cross-roads in South Wales, and the ruinous multitude of separate trusts, which rendered a ticket given on one line unavailing even within two hundred yards, if you turned off it. Such was the weight of these exactions, that they had come, in many places, to absorb nearly the whole profit of farmers in carrying their humble produce to market. These complaints, however, as is generally the case with the statement of grievances not supported by powerful Parliamentary influence which persuades, or violent popular resistance which intimidates, met with no attention, and the people secretly determined to take the matter into their own hands. In 1839 a set of gates peculiarly obnoxious had been pulled down by the people who suffered under them, and several of the county magistrates, by becoming trustees on the roads, had prevented their being again put up. The victory, as usual in all cases where popular will effects its object by illegal means, only led

82.
Rebecca
riots.

CHAP.
XLI.

1843.

¹ (Gen. xxiv.
60.

to fresh acts of violence. The people held meetings of persons suffering under the exactions in remote and sequestered places at night, and organised a conspiracy of a very singular kind. They chose for their text the words of Scripture, "And they blessed Rebecca, and said unto her, Let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them."¹ In pursuance of the plan agreed on, they elected a chief, dressed him in women's clothes, and set about the destruction of all the gates which they deemed objectionable, and the hindrance of their reconstruction. The work of destruction began in the winter 1842-43, and at first it was deemed rather a mischievous frolic than anything else; but ere long it assumed a more serious aspect. In the daytime everything was quiet and orderly in the extreme. The farmers paid their tolls as usual at all the gates without complaint, and work in the fields and villages went on as usual. But no sooner did darkness set in than bands of armed men began to traverse the roads and surround the obnoxious toll-bars. The loud sound of horns was heard on all sides, calling the peasantry, who were for the most part inclined to their side, to join in the work of destruction. The discharge of firearms and the sound of the horns announced *their approach*; in the twinkling of an eye the toll-house was surrounded by a crowd of men in male and female attire, the doors forced open, and the inmates led out or bound with cords. Immediately the building was unroofed, the walls levelled, the toll-bar destroyed, and nothing but a heap of ruins left to mark where it had stood. In the morning all was again quiet; the labourers were alone seen at work in the fields; carts, as usual, traversed the roads, and but for the crowds which collected with secret triumph round the scene of former devastation, no one could have suspected that anything unusual had occurred.²

² Ann. Reg.
1843, 258,
264; Times'
Reporter,
July 1843;
Spectator,
1843, 869,
875; Mart.
ii. 524, 525.

These disorders, as is usually the case when they break out in a rural district where no police force exists, or

means are in existence either to prevent crime or arrest its perpetrators, for long went on unpunished. Large bodies of troops and police were sent down from London to the disturbed districts, with several of the most skilled detectives of the metropolis. For long, however, the rioters, as often occurs in such cases, eluded the whole efforts of the magistrates, in consequence of the universal adherence of the peasantry to the cause, and the rapid intelligence which they sent to the bands of rioters of the approach of any body of military or police, which was instantly followed by their dispersion and flight. At length, however, matters came to such a point that even the sympathy of the peasantry was alienated from the insurgents. Incendiarism was committed in many places, murder in some. . An old woman, aged seventy-two, was shot dead, while the roof of her cottage was blazing around her. These atrocities roused the indignation of the better part of the people, who ceased in consequence to lend their aid to the escape or screening of the culprits. Twice Rebecca's horse was shot dead under her, and though the rider escaped on foot, yet several of her followers were captured, and committed for trial. Government, now thoroughly alarmed, acted energetically. A proclamation was issued by the Queen, calling on the magistrates and all good subjects to do their duty, and a royal commission sent down for the trial of the prisoners, who had now become very numerous.¹

CHAP.
XLI.
1843.
82.
Increase of
the riots.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1843, 262;
Mart. ii.
525.

Baron Gurney, who presided over the commission, acted with equal humanity and discretion: his addresses to the prisoners drew tears from the eyes of all who heard them, from the intermixture they contained of the tenderness of a parent with the justice of a judge. Three of the worst were sentenced to long periods of transportation; the remainder, who were for the most part deluded peasants, escaped with various periods of imprisonment. The convicts issued an address to their countrymen recommending the cessation of rural disorders; and the commission of inquiry,

84.
Termination of the
troubles,
and bill
removing
their cause.

CHAP.
XLI.

1843.

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxvi. 1954;
Ann. Reg.
1843, 262;
Spectator,
1843, 1036;
Mart. ii.
525, 526.

which was everywhere most favourably received, reported in favour of a general consolidation of the turnpike trusts through South Wales; and a bill passed both houses of Parliament in the next session, founded on their recommendation.* Thus the Rebecca insurrection terminated in the entire success of the objects for which it was originally undertaken; and it leads to the melancholy reflection, that all the disorders and suffering consequent on it might have been avoided if the Government and Legislature had at once redressed the real injustice complained of, and paid that attention to *provincial* grievances at a distance from the seat of power, which they seldom fail to do to metropolitan, at its door.¹

85.
The Chart-
ist and Anti-
Corn-Law
movements.

Although the symptoms of amendment in several branches of manufacture was very apparent in the latter part of 1843, yet the general distress was still so great as to encourage both the Chartists and Anti-Corn-Law League to continue in their respective spheres the agitation of the public mind. Such was the activity of the former class of agitators, that they got up a petition, which was presented to the House of Commons, praying for the establishment of the six points of the Charter and the abolition of all monopolies, and which was said to contain 3,500,000 signatures! From the manner in which these petitions

* There is no reform in domestic administration more loudly called for than a general consolidation of road trusts, at least in every county, so that a ticket given at one bar shall be available at any other bar within five miles. This would be attended with equal benefit to the public, the road trustees, and those who have advanced money for them, for it would diminish essentially the expense of management. In the county of Mid-Lothian, where the produce of the tolls is £42,000 a-year, no less than £7000 annually has been saved by consolidating the trusts, while the public have obtained the great advantage of paying only one toll in five miles in any direction. Were a similar system adopted in the county of Lanark, it would probably, with a similar advantage to the community, effect a saving of £20,000 a-year; in that of York, of £80,000. The real obstacle to this great reform, as to most others, is the interested views of the surveyors and law agents on the several trusts, who would be affected by the change, and whose resistance to it has hitherto proved insurmountable from the influence they have acquired over the country gentlemen who nominally direct the affairs of the trusts. So powerful is this influence that it will probably never be overcome but by a general national movement, aided by the whole weight of Government.

were at that time got up by the popular agitators, it is probable the real number of signatures was not half so great, but still the number was immense. It was brought to the House by a long procession of working men, and it required sixteen men to carry it into the House. Mr Duncombe, who presented it, asserted that, after deducting those of youths and females, the signatures of 1,300,000 heads of families were appended to the petition. It made a great sensation, and Sir James Graham, on the part of Government, admitted the reality and wide extent of the distress of which the petitioners complained. From the emphatic manner in which "monopolies" were denounced in the petition, it was evident that the Anti-Corn-Law agitators had got the direction of the movement, or that a coalition had been entered into between the two sets of agitation. This impression was increased by a mournful event which occurred in January 1843, when Mr Drum-
mond, private secretary to Sir R. Peel, was murdered near the Salopian Coffee-house, in Parliament Street, by an assassin, who mistook him for Sir R. Peel. It was proved at the trial that he was insane, and he was sentenced to confinement for life; but in the mean time the obnoxious act excited a very great degree of consternation, from an apprehension that it was the work of one or other of the great combinations by which the country was now convulsed. To such a length did this feeling go, that a most vehement debate took place soon after in Parliament, in the course of which Sir R. Peel declared that he held Mr Cobden "formally responsible" for the misery of the people.¹

CHAP.
XLI.
1843.

Jan. 21.

Feb. 17.
1 Ann. Reg.
1842, 152,
153—1843,
6, 7; Chron.;
Parl. Deb.
lxvii. 143;
Mart. ii.
527, 528.

The distressed state of Great Britain ever since the monetary crisis of 1839, led, as it always does, to disputes with foreign powers, who sought to take advantage of our distresses to advance pretensions, or make acquisitions at our expense for themselves. The Americans had never got over the check they had received in their attempts to revolutionise Canada during the troubles of 1838; and,

86.
Differences
with Ame-
rica.

CHAP.
XLI.

1843.

in particular, they retained a very sore recollection of the catastrophe of the "Caroline," by which Sir Allan M'Nab had so signally defeated them. Matters were very near being brought to a crisis by the arrest of Mr M'Leod, a British subject, who was seized when transacting business in New York, on a charge of being implicated in that affair, and as the person who had slain one of the men who had perished on the occasion. The magistrates before whom he was brought, were about to discharge the prisoner on bail, seeing the offence, if offence it was, had been committed on British territory; but a mob got up and prevented his liberation, and this led to a report of a committee of Congress, to whom the matter had been referred, so extremely hostile, that it amounted to little short of a declaration of war. M'Leod, accordingly, was detained for trial, and this led to an unjustifiable incursion of some zealous Canadians into the American territory to get hold of a hostage for M'Leod, where they seized Colonel Grogan, an American subject, accused of incendiary acts in Canada. Fortunately M'Leod was able to bring such overwhelming evidence of an alibi, that after a very impartial charge from the judge, he was acquitted; and the wisdom of the British Government at once ordered the liberation of Grogan, so that the danger, which had been very great, passed away for the present.¹

¹ Ann. Reg.
1841, 317;
Mr Fox's
Note, March
12, 1841;
Mart. ii.
653.

87.
Question of
the right of
search.

The feelings of rancour on both sides, which these events had produced, did not, however, yet subside. A more serious cause of dispute soon after arose, founded on the right which the British Government claimed, and its cruisers exercised, of stopping American vessels, and searching them, with a view to ascertain whether they were British vessels carrying on the slave-trade under the American flag. This was quite a different right from that of searching neutral vessels during war to ascertain whether they were conveying articles contraband of war, so much the object of dispute during the revolutionary contest, and was grounded, not on an alleged right to search the American vessels

as neutrals, but the right to examine whether or not they were British vessels engaged in an illegal traffic. The Americans, however, maintained that this right of mutual search applied only to States which had signed treaties permitting it to prevent the Slave Trade, and that, as they were not parties to these treaties, they could not permit their vessels to be searched on the ground of looking for slaves, or on any other pretence. Lord Palmerston, on the other hand, while admitting that the Americans were no parties to these treaties, maintained that a right to stop American merchantmen, and call for production of their papers to see whether they were not British vessels carrying on the slave trade in disguise, was indispensable to prevent that odious traffic being carried on to an unlimited extent under neutral flags. The discussion had gone on for some time, when the Whigs went out of office, and then wore a very unpromising aspect; for the feelings of large bodies of men, the slave-owners in America, on the one side, and the British emancipators on the other, were involved in the contest, and neither Government could venture openly to resist their demands. Matters, too, had been much complicated by an insurrection of some slaves on board the American brig "*Creole*," which had sailed from New Orleans in October 1841, which proved successful, and ended in the slaves killing one man and wounding the captain, after which they brought the vessel to the British harbour of Nassau, in New Providence. The whole negroes, 133 in number, were liberated by the British authorities, under the directions of Government, upon the ground that every slave became free as soon as he touched the British soil, and that there was no law authorising the detention even of those charged with the mutiny and murder committed, not in the British dominions, but on the high seas.¹

¹ Ann. Reg.
1842, 309—
1843, 318;
Parl. Deb.
lx. 320;
Mart. ii.
654, 655.

The indignation of the Americans was loudly excited by this untoward event. The slave States of the Union immediately took fire; denunciations of piracy and abet-

CHAP.
XLT.

1843.

88.

The ques-
tion is set-
tled by Lord
Aberdeen.

ting murder were loudly hurled at the British government, and blood and fire were openly threatened in return. But never was a truer maxim than that it requires the consent of two persons to make a quarrel. A soft word, a seasonable explanation, often turns aside wrath, and sometimes prevents the most serious wars that threaten to devastate the world. When Lord Aberdeen succeeded to the Foreign Office in September 1841, he spared no pains to explain to the American Government the real nature of the right for which the British contended, and to soften the demand by the offer of reparation in all cases where injury had really been sustained, and a full exposition of the orders given to the British cruisers, which were of the most forbearing description. Fortunately for the peace of the world, these explanations, conceived in the most mild and conciliatory spirit, were met with similar dispositions on the part of the American minister in London, Mr Stevenson, who laboured not less assiduously to explain to his Government the real nature of the British pretensions and the spirit of moderation by which their Government was actuated. The result was an amicable adjustment of this most delicate and dangerous question, without any loss of character or honour on either side. The British Government disclaimed all right to stop or search American vessels *as such* during peace, or to do more than merely require production of their papers, to see whether or not they really belonged to the nation whose flag they bore, with a view to discovering whether they had slaves on board, and then only under such restrictions and responsibilities as effectually guarded against abuse; and the American admitted that "the apparent difference between the two governments was one of definition rather than principle, and that a right to be exercised only under such restrictions, can scarcely be considered as anything more than a privilege asked for and either conceded or withheld on the usual principles of international co-unity."¹ Thus was the question, once so threatening, satisfactorily adjusted, and it

¹ Ann. Reg.
1842, 309—
1843, 318;
President's
Message.

was settled that when reasonable grounds existed for suspecting that the United States flag was used only as a pretence, the British cruiser might stop the vessel and demand production of the ship's papers, under the liability of making reparation for damage or delay, in the event of the vessel proving to be really American.^{1*}

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Scarcely was this delicate question in this manner satisfactorily adjusted than a fresh and still more serious cause of difference arose from the unsettled state of the Maine frontier. This arose from the ignorance which prevailed on both sides when the treaty recognising the independence of the United States by Great Britain was concluded in 1783, in regard to the geography of the wild and uninhabited district which lay between Canada and the adjoining provinces of America, and the little importance

89.
Dispute
about the
Maine bound-
ary: Its
origin.

* "The undersigned renounces all pretension on the part of the British Government to visit and search American vessels in time of peace. Nor is it as *American* that such vessels are ever visited. But it has been the invariable practice of the British navy, and as the undersigned believes, of all the navies in the world, to ascertain by visit the real nationality of merchant vessels met with on the high seas. In certain latitudes, and for a particular object, the vessels referred to are visited, not as American but rather as British vessels engaged in an unlawful traffic, and carrying the flag of the United States for a criminal purpose, or as belonging to states which have by treaty ceded the right of search to Great Britain, and which right it is attempted to defeat by fraudulently bearing the protecting flag of the Union, or finally as piratical outlaws, professing no claim to flag or nationality whatever. Should the vessel visited prove American, the undersigned adds with pain that even though manacles, fetters, or instruments of torture, or even a number of slaves are found on board, the British officer could interfere no further."—LORD ABERDEEN to MR STEVENSON, *Sept. 14, 1841; Ann. Reg. 1842, 310, 311.*

"To seize and detain," said the American President in reply, "a ship upon suspicion of piracy, with probable cause and in good faith, affords no just ground either for complaint on the part of the nation whose flag she bears, or claim of indemnity on the part of the owner. *The universal law sanctions, and the common good requires, the existence of such a rule.* The right under such circumstances not only to visit and detain, but to search a ship, is a perfect right, and involves neither responsibility nor indemnity. But with this single exception, no nation has a right in time of peace to detain the ships of another upon the high seas on any pretext whatever beyond the limits of the territorial jurisdiction. And such, I am happy to find, is substantially the doctrine of Great Britain herself in her most recent official declarations, and even in those communicated to the House. The declarations may well lead us to doubt whether the apparent difference between the two Governments be not one rather of definition than of principle."—*President's Message to Congress, February 27, 1843; Ann. Reg. 1843, p. 318.*

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then attached to a line of demarcation through forests, which it was not then anticipated could ever come to be of value to either State. By degrees, however, this once solitary and secluded region came to be settled by the adventurous pioneers of civilisation on either side, and it became of the highest importance to ascertain to which they really belonged. The difficulty arose from the words in the treaty of 1783, which said that the frontier would be "a ridge which divides the waters which flow into the St Lawrence from those which flow into the Atlantic." The Americans maintained that the Bay of Fundy was part of the Atlantic, and that the ridge here referred to was one running from the head of the St Croix northward to certain highlands, which in this way came to include the whole of the St John River. A map was referred to in this treaty, but it was not at first discovered, and the matter was referred to arbitration in 1794, with power to choose an oversman by lot, and the lot having fallen to the Americans, he determined in favour of the American line. A map was published by Mr Tudors in 1783 in London, which adopted the American line, and another two years after which took the British line ; and what is very singular, it came out afterwards that there was one map in the possession of the British Government which took the American line, and another in the possession of the American which adopted the British. In these circumstances there was abundant room for doubt and dispute on both sides ; and the diplomatists on neither can be accused of bad faith, because they did not produce the documents on either, which militated against the sides which they were respectively called on to espouse. But what seems to cast the balance in a decisive way in favour of the British line is the fact that there was discovered in the archives of the Foreign Office at Paris a letter by Dr Franklin, who concluded the treaty, to M. de Vergennes, then Minister of Foreign Affairs at Paris, in which he says, "I have traced what I take to be the line in Mr Oswald's treaty" (that of

1783). A line was found in red ink in the map in possession of the American Government, which coincided with that contended for by the British Government; and coupling this fact with the expression in Franklin's letter, who drew the treaty and concluded it, there seems to be no doubt that this was the line intended on both sides by its authors.¹*

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1843.

¹ Lord Brougham; Parl. Deb. lxviii. 623, 624.

However this matter may stand as to the original merits of the dispute, nothing can be clearer than that it had become long after a fit subject of arbitration and compromise. The matter was referred, by mutual consent, to the King of Holland, and he gave an award, deciding two points in dispute in favour of the British, but not settling the third point, upon this ground, that there were not sufficient materials to determine what were "the highlands" mentioned in the treaty of 1783. Although this award brought the Americans much nearer the St Lawrence than was deemed consistent with the security of the British possessions in Canada, the British Government not only offered, but anxiously pressed, that the matter in dispute might be adjusted in terms of it; but the Americans refused to be bound by the award, alleging that the arbitrator was only empowered to decide in favour of one or other line, but not to divide the matter in dispute between them. Lord Palmerston, upon this, sent out two sets of commissioners,—one in 1839, to inquire into the merits of the line claimed by the British, and another in 1841, to do the same with that claimed by the Americans, and they both reported in favour of the British line. Matters were in this unsettled state, with the preponderance of evidence decidedly in favour of the

90.
Proceed-
ings regard-
ing the dis-
pute.

* "The map of Franklin," said Lord Campbell, "is, in my opinion, quite conclusive. If you assume that the map now known to be in existence was the map, as *I believe it was*, which was referred to in the letter of Dr Franklin, the negotiator of the treaty, to the Count de Vergennes, this was the very map on which the treaty was made, and after the production of that map before a jury of Englishmen, there would not be the slightest doubt as to what was the true boundary."—LORD CAMPBELL, *Parl. Deb.* lxviii. 663.

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1843.

claim advanced by England, when Sir R. Peel came into power in October 1841. He was in no condition to assert the pretensions of his Government by force of arms. Two bad harvests, combined with an erroneous monetary system, had landed the nation in a deficiency of £4,000,000 yearly, including the cost of the Chinese and Affghanistan wars ; and the naval and military establishments of the country, starved down to the very lowest point, were unable to meet any fresh requirements. Compromise was, therefore, to him not only recommended by prudence, but dictated by necessity, and he adopted the most effectual means for bringing it about. He selected Lord Ashburton for a pacific mission—a nobleman of distinguished talents and most conciliatory manners, and who, lately elevated to the peerage, was still the head of one of the greatest mercantile houses in the world, and intimately acquainted, both from business connections and extensive information, with the state of public feeling in America. Under such auspices, the matter was soon brought to a satisfactory issue. He left London in February 1842, and in August following concluded a treaty at Washington, which settled both the boundary question and the right of searching ships on the high seas in time of peace.¹

Aug. 9.

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxiii. 564,
lxvii. 1242.

91.
Terms of the
treaty, and
its reception
in Great
Britain.

By this treaty, the Americans obtained about seven-twelfths of the disputed territory, and the British only five-twelfths. They got the British settlement of Madawaska, and the navigation of the river of St John, and their territory ran in a salient angle almost into the heart of Canada. On the other hand, they were farther removed from the St Lawrence than they had been by the King of Holland's award, and they were excluded from a series of heights, of importance in a military point of view, on the right or American side of that river. Upon the whole, the balance, both in point of extent and value of acquisition, was decidedly in favour of the Americans ; and although there were many complaints, in the first

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1843.

instance, in the United States, yet, upon the whole, the country was satisfied, and Lord Ashburton was splendidly fêted in his travels through it on his return home. The feeling in Great Britain was more mixed, and with many of a more painful description. All were agreed that it was a great blessing that peace had been preserved, and that the whole territory in dispute was not worth one half-year's cost of a war. But there were many who regretted the sacrifice, not so much of dominion as of character, by which the pacification had been purchased. It was asked whether such a treaty would have been agreed to in the days of Chatham and Pitt,—how a great nation was to preserve its position in the world, if it surrendered its possessions rather than draw the sword; and Lord Palmerston's happy sobriquet of "the Ashburton capitulation" expressed so completely the general feeling, that it has come to designate the treaty ever since it was concluded.

But all this notwithstanding, there seems no doubt that Sir R. Peel and Lord Ashburton did right, *situated as they were*, in concluding the treaty. Granting all that Lord Palmerston said on the subject to be perfectly well founded, so far as the external character and influence of Great Britain were concerned, the question yet remained, whether, adverting to the internal situation of the country, it was then possible to have asserted the national honour in any more vigorous way. England had come, by pursuing the policy of looking only to the cheapest market for the purchase of the materials of its chief manufactures, to be dependent on the United States for five-sixths of the cottons which gave bread to the inhabitants of her chief manufacturing towns. She had established a system of currency which had rendered general credit and commercial industry of every kind entirely dependent on the retention of gold, and, in consequence of its large export, to buy grain during the five preceding bad years, the whole commercial and manufacturing classes had come

92.
Reflections
on it.

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1843.

to be involved in the deepest distress. She had recently sustained an unparalleled disaster in Affghanistan, and had only just emerged from a costly war both in India and China. She had a military and naval force on so very reduced a scale, that not more than ten thousand men could have been collected, after providing for the necessary garrisons, to defend London, or ten sail of the line to assert the honour of the British flag in the Channel. In these circumstances, to have plunged into a fresh war with a considerable naval power, and the one from whom the materials for our chief manufactures were derived, would have been hazardous in the extreme, and might have induced dangers wholly disproportioned to any advantages to be derived from the contest.

93.
The Oregon
question :
its history.

Encouraged by the success with which the bold assertion of their claims on the Maine frontier had been attended, the Americans next proceeded to adopt a similar policy on the other side of the Rocky Mountains. A vast district of country, called OREGON, then lay between that alpine barrier and the sea, of great importance from its natural fertility, its mineral riches,—the rich island of Vancouver, two hundred and fifty miles long, abounding with coal, belonging to its territory,—and the command which it afforded of the Columbia river, the great stream which descended from its western fountains, and the destined channel of communication from the St Lawrence and the great chain of lakes to the Pacific Ocean. So little was either the geography or importance of this immense region understood when the treaty with the United States, in 1783, was concluded, that, literally speaking, nothing was arranged at all regarding it. So unsettled was the matter, and so discordant the claims of the British Government and the United States on the subject, that Lord Castlereagh said to Mr Rush, the American Minister, in 1822, that, “by holding up a finger; war could at any time be produced about it.” So wide were the American pretensions, and so warm the feelings excited,

on both sides, that it was with no small difficulty that that lamented statesman, and after him Mr Canning, prevented hostilities actually breaking out regarding it. Sensible of the danger of such a state of things, the two Governments, in 1818, entered into a convention, by which the whole Oregon territory was to be open to settlers from both countries for the period of ten years, and this state of promiscuous occupation was to continue for an indefinite period after. It was impossible, however, that this uncertain and precarious state could remain after the country began to be occupied by settlers, however few and far between on either side. It was indispensable that they should know to whom they belonged, and to which government they owed allegiance. This necessity became more pressing when the increasing numbers and augmented spirit of adventure in the United States led to great numbers of the inhabitants of that country leaving their homes, and seeking new settlements in distant regions. In 1842 and 1843, great numbers of these hardy pioneers of civilisation, impelled by the want and stagnation of enterprise, which General Jackson's crusade against the banks had produced in the United States, crossed the Rocky Mountains, and, armed only with their rifle, cartridge belt, axe, and scrip, boldly settled in the desert wilderness. So strong did the passion for maintaining and extending these settlements become, that, in 1843, the President of the United States was constrained to give notice to the British Government, that he was about to put an end to the existing state of promiscuous possession—a determination which rendered it necessary to fix a boundary-line on this side also between the territories of the two Governments.¹

¹President's Message, 1824; Ann. Reg. 1824, 317; Canning's Life, i. 337; Parl. Deb. lxxxiii. 3; Ann. Reg. 1846, 320.

It was no easy matter to effect this object, for the passions of the Americans, now strongly excited, were hurrying them in great numbers to what they deemed the land of promise on the other side of the Rocky Moun-

94.
Conclusion of a treaty.

CHAP. tains. Large caravans were formed which traversed the
 1843. pathless prairies, found their way over the stony barrier,
 and descended into the boundless wastes which extended
 from its foot to the shores of the Pacific: It seemed,
 from the numbers which went, and the haste with which
 their journey was urged on, that they were desirous to
 forestall the British, and occupy the country in dispute in
 such numbers that any attempt to dislodge or transfer
 them would be impossible to either power. In a word,
 they were doing exactly the thing which, at the same
 time, they effected in Texas, which was to squat down in
 sufficient numbers on the territory, to render it worth
 while for the Union to incorporate it with their other
 States, whereby, at one blow, they wrested from the
 Spaniards a region of 350,000 square miles in extent,
 or more than twice the area of France. The language
 used in Congress on the subject, especially in 1844
 and 1845, was extremely violent, insomuch as to leave
 a pacific solution of the question apparently hopeless.
 To such a length did they go, that on 23d April 1846
 the Congress passed a resolution that notice of the
 termination of the joint occupancy should be sent to
 the British Government, and providing for the occu-
 pation of the Oregon territory. This bill passed the
 Senate by a majority of 42 to 10, and the House of Re-
 presentatives by 142 to 46. Every one in both coun-
 tries now expected that the next step would be an as-
 sertion of their right to the entire territory in dispute,
 and an appeal to arms for its support. Fortunately,
 however, for the peace of the world, the Government of
 the United States was guided by more pacific views, and
 the treasury had not sufficiently recovered the terrible
 monetary crisis produced by General Jackson's crusade
 against the banks, to render it advisable to face a fresh
 war, which would immediately lead to the destruction of
 their foreign trade, and ruin of the large revenue they
 derived from the import duties,¹ at the very time when

April 23,
1846.

June 1846.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1846, 326,
327; Mart.
ii. 656, 657.

they had just declared war against the Republic of Mexico. Lord Aberdeen sent out a proposal for a compromise, which was approved of by a large majority in the Senate, and accepted by the President, Mr Rush.

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XLI.
1843.

By this treaty, which arranged the respective claims of the parties on a very equitable footing, the territory on the continent was divided between the parties in such a way as to give the larger portion to the United States. The line stretched from a point in the 49th "latitude to the middle of the channel which separates the continent from Vancouver's Island, and thence southerly through the middle of the said channel and up Fuca Strait, provided that the navigation of the whole of the said channel and straits south of the 49th parallel of north latitude shall remain free and open to both parties. From the point which the 49th parallel of north latitude shall be found to intersect the great northern branch of the Columbia river, the navigation of the said branch shall be open to the Hudson Bay Company, and British subjects trading with the same, to the point where the said branch meets the main stream of the Columbia, and thence down the said main stream to the ocean." By this arrangement the whole of Vancouver's Island, a possession of great importance, remained to Great Britain. It enjoys a temperate climate, not unlike that of the British Islands; and from the valuable seams of coal which it contains, must ultimately come to be a possession of very great value. So closely joined are the British and American territories on the other side of the Rocky Mountains, and so much detached from all the rest of the world, that the celebrated American statesman, Mr Webster, has declared his conviction, that ere long their inhabitants will detach themselves from both States, and set up a separate Republic of their own on the shores of the Pacific.¹

95.
Its terms.

¹ Treaty, June 17, 1846; Ann. Reg. 1846, 327, 328.

These treaties, conducted with such difficulties, between Great Britain and the United States, are worthy of

CHAP.
XLI.

1843.

96.
Reflections
on these
Treaties.

remark, as indicating the advent of the period when the American population was bursting the limits of their territories, wide as they were, and pouring over in mighty streams into the adjoining States. So strong was this disposition, that it was with difficulty that the Governments withstood the pressure; and it was only by the accidental circumstance of the largest portion of the flood breaking into Texas, that the whole of Oregon was prevented from being overwhelmed. This is a very singular circumstance, especially when the stationary condition of the French population in Lower Canada is taken into consideration. It adds another to the many proofs with which history abounds, that Republican States, so far from being the most pacific, are the most warlike and aggressive of all nations; and that the *multis utile bellum* is in them a stronger provocative to conquest than either the ambition of kings or the rivalry of ministers. It points distinctly to democratic institutions as the great *expelling force* which drives civilised man from his native seats, and fills the wilderness of nature with hardy settlers, the destined fathers of mighty nations. But it is calculated not less strongly to evince how peculiarly these qualities are developed in the Anglo-Saxon more than any other race of mankind, and how admirably adapted their disposition, at once nomad and agricultural, is to their destined mission of clearing and peopling the vast forests which overspread the surface of the New World.

97.
Origin of
the Otaheite
dispute with
France.

America was not the only quarter in which, during the administration of Sir R. Peel, the British empire was threatened with hostility. It was on the very verge also of a war with France, and strange to say, the cause of discord was not any jealousy or ambitious projects of either power in Europe, but a contest for the protectorate of the distant island of Otaheite in the Pacific Ocean. To understand how this came about, it is necessary to premise that the beautiful island of Otaheite, so well known to British readers from Cook's Voyages, had of

late years been visited by the English missionaries, and its inhabitants had readily and sincerely embraced the Protestant faith. So rapid had been the spread of the Christian religion among the simple islanders of the Pacific, that the most sanguine hopes were entertained in England, that the entire conversion of the South Sea Islands would follow its establishment in the group of islands which surrounded Otaheite. The queen of that island, named Pomare, had embraced Christianity, and was a pupil of the missionaries. Sensible of the weakness of her little kingdom, she was very desirous of being taken under the protection of Great Britain, or as she expressed it, "to be allowed to sit under their flag." She accordingly made an application to George IV., in 1825, praying "that he would not abandon them, but regard them with kindness for ever." Lord Palmerston, however, who was Foreign Minister when the application arrived, was aware of the embarrassment which the protectorate of so distant and feeble a state might occasion, declined the proffered honour, though with every expression of friendship and regard for Queen Pomare and her subjects.¹

CHAP.
XLI.

1843.

1825.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1842, 337;
Mart. ii.
616, 647;
Guizot,
Mem. Sir
R. Peel,
153.

Meanwhile the French Roman Catholic missionaries, not less anxious than the English for the spread of their own faith, had also fixed upon Otaheite as the centre of their operations in the South Sea; and it was the rival pretensions of the missionaries of these two opposite creeds which embroiled the two countries, and had so nearly involved them in war. The Catholic missionaries, it would appear, had been hurried away by their zeal to carry matters too far, for in 1836 Queen Pomare sent a letter through Mr Pritchard, the British consul at Otaheite, requesting to know "whether the Roman Catholic missionaries who belonged to France, and persisted in coming to Otaheite and disturbing the peace of our Government, had the sanction of the British Government?" Lord Palmerston prudently replied that, as

98.
Interfer-
ence of
the French
mission-
aries.
1836-37.

CHAP.
VII

Otaheite was an independent state, the Queen of England could not in any manner interfere with the residence of foreigners in a territory which did not belong to her. The French, however, were not so easily 'got quit of'; for they had formed, or were desirous of forming, a settlement in some of the adjoining islands, forming part of the Marquesas cluster, for the double purpose of establishing a harbour of refuge for their commercial vessels engaged in the South Sea fishery, and of founding a convict colony which might serve as a receptacle for part of the criminals with which their prisons in France were overcharged, and procure for that country some of the advantages which England had so long enjoyed from her penal settlements in New South Wales. The French authorities in this settlement complained that some outrages had been committed on two French missionaries, Messrs Laval and Cazet, who had been in Otaheite for the purpose of weaning over the natives from the Protestant to the Catholic faith, and this was made a ground by Admiral Dupetit-Thouars, the French commander on the station, for demanding reparation. Accordingly, on the 30th August 1838, he appeared off the island in the frigate *Venus*, having a body of land troops on board, and demanded, in the most summary way, that a letter of apology should be written by the Queen to the French Government, the sum of 2000 dollars paid to the persons injured, and the French colours hoisted on the island, and saluted with 21 guns on the 1st September. Being in no situation to resist this demand, Queen Pomare entered into a convention, in virtue of which all Frenchmen of every profession were to be allowed to establish themselves and trade freely in every part of her dominions.¹

Aug. 30,
1838.

¹ Treaty,
Aug. 30,
1838; Ann.
Reg. 1842,
338; Ann.
Hist. 1842,
254—App.
250; Guizot,
Sir R. Peel,
154, 157.

99.
The French
take possession
of
Otaheite.

This convention, however, satisfied neither party. The presence of the French was so obnoxious to Queen Pomare, or her advisers, that in November of the same year she addressed another letter to Lord Palmerston praying for the protection of the British Government.

“Let,” said she, “your flag cover us, and your lion defend us; determine the form in which we may shelter ourselves lawfully under your wings.” In September 1839, Lord Palmerston returned an answer, which expressed concern for the difficulties which beset Queen Pomare, but declined to enter into an alliance, as “it would be impossible for her Britannic Majesty to fulfil with proper punctuality the defensive obligation which such a treaty would imply.” The consequence was that the Queen, deprived of all aid from England, and unable to resist the hostile force with which she was threatened, was constrained to enter into a convention, in virtue of which the flag of Otaheite was lowered, and that of France hoisted in its room. This formal act of possession took place on 9th September 1842, regularly notified to the British Government. The instructions to Admiral Thouars had been to occupy the Marquesas Islands, but not Otaheite; so that this taking possession was unauthorised; but the French Government, deeming the national honour involved in supporting the act of their naval lieutenants, did not hesitate to ratify the protectorate, though they disavowed the assumed sovereignty.¹

CHAP.
XLI.
1843.

Sept. 9,
1842.

¹ Guizot,
158; Ann.
Reg. 1843,
272.

As it was only a protectorate, not an absolute dominion, which the French Government ratified in Otaheite, they engaged to respect the British missions; and although the British Government felt some jealousy at this assumption of their ancient rivals in a country which had long been on friendly terms with them, yet the moderation of the two Governments prevented any collision, and promised a pacific solution of the question. But difficult are all attempts of governments to preserve the peace of the world when that worst element of discord, religious zeal, has roused the passions of the people. From an island which slept in peace on the placid waters of the Pacific, arose a tempest which had well-nigh spread over the world. The Catholic and Protestant missionaries in Otaheite made the most strenuous efforts mutually

100.
Affair of Mr
Pritchard,
which com-
plicates the
case.

CHAP.
XLI.
1844.

to supplant each other in the affections of the natives and both, animated with a zeal at once ardent and sincere, strove to establish their respective faiths by the ruin of their opponents. These feelings on both sides could hardly fail, ere long, to lead to a collision; and it occurred under circumstances which threatened the most serious results. An English missionary, Mr Pritchard, had become consul in the island; and although he had resigned his office when the French protectorate was established, his resignation had not been accepted, and he *still ad interim held the office. He was very obnoxious to the French authorities on account of his zeal and influence with the natives, who had contracted a strong aversion to their Gallic masters; and a French sentinel having been disarmed by the natives, on the night of the 2d March 1844, it was made a pretext for seizing and imprisoning Mr Pritchard "in reprisal;" and he was released only on condition of his instantly leaving the Pacific. This he accordingly did, without seeing his family, and reached London by the way of Valparaiso. Matters now looked very serious, for the dignity of England had been outraged in the person of its accredited consul; and that of France seemed not less implicated in maintaining what had been done. Warm feelings were excited and expressed on both sides when the intelligence reached the two countries; and Sir R. Peel declared in Parliament, on 31st July 1844, "that the account was scarcely credible, so impossible did it seem that such an outrage could be offered under the circumstances; but that the reply of the French Government to the remonstrances of England would soon arrive, when it would doubtless appear they would be as ready to disavow this act as that of dethroning Queen Pomare."*

¹

¹ Ann. Reg.
1844, 261;
Parl. Deb.
lxxiii. 241;
Spectator,
1844, 724.

Fortunately there were at the head of the foreign affairs of the two Governments, at this moment, two men who, equally alive to the honour of their country, were yet not less impressed with the paramount importance of pre-

serving peace between them, and who felt that each had succeeded to such an inheritance of historic glory that it could afford to listen only to the dictates of reason and justice. M. Guizot felt that the French officer concerned in the affair had overstepped due bounds in the removal of Mr Pritchard, and agreed to make him reparation, the amount of which was to be referred to the British and French Admirals on the station; and Lord Aberdeen agreed to accept this reparation without insisting for the dismissal of the officer who had given orders for his seizure. *The right of dominion over Otaheite, at first asserted by Admiral Dupetit-Thouars, had been disclaimed by the French Government, and the more modest title of Protectorate alone assumed. Thus was this delicate and dangerous affair adjusted by mutual moderation and good sense, without any injury to the honour of either party; and M. Guizot, in announcing it to the Chamber of Deputies, expressed in noble and generous terms the principles by which the Governments of both had been actuated. "The good understanding which now subsists between the two Governments has been called an *entente cordiale*; friendship, alliance. Gentlemen, it is so; but it is something more novel, more rare, more great, than all that. There are now in France and England two Governments, who believe that there is room in the world for the prosperity and the material and moral activity of both countries; who do not think that they are obliged to regret, deplore, or fear, their mutual progress; and who are satisfied that they may, by the full development of their forces of every kind, aid instead of injuring each other. And the two Governments who believe that it is possible to do this, believe also that it is their duty to do it—that they owe it alike to the honour and the good of their country, to the peace and the civilisation of the world. And that which they mutually believe possible they have actually done; they have reduced their ideas to practice, and they have evinced on every occasion a*

CHAP.
XLI.

1844.

102.

The matter
is adjusted.

CHAP. mutual respect for rights, a mutual attention to interests,
 XLI. a mutual trust in intentions and words. This is what they
 1844. have done ; and thence it is that incidents the most delicate, events the most grave, are accommodated without producing either a rupture or even a coldness in the relations of the two countries." Noble words ! betokening the rise of that spirit, founded on mutual respect and admiration, which led these two ancient rivals to stand side by side on the fields of Alma and Inkermann.¹

¹ *Moniteur*,
 Jan. 22,
 1845; *Guizot*,
Sir R. Peel, 169;
Ann. Reg.
 1844, 257,
 261.

102.
 Spanish
 marriages.

Negotiations of the highest importance took place between Great Britain and France at this period, regarding the Spanish marriages and succession ; but they will come to be narrated with more propriety in the history of the latter country during the same time, as they had a material influence on its future fortunes, and determined in some degree the ultimate fate of Louis Philippe.

103.
 Reduction
 of the 3½
 per cents.
 March 8,
 1844.

The reviving prosperity of the country, in consequence of the cessation of the import of grain, and increased issue of notes in 1843 and 1844, had so raised the price of stocks as enabled the Chancellor of the Exchequer to bring forward a bill, in March 1844, for the further reduction of the whole public funds excepting the 3 per cents. The 3½ per cents, which composed £250,000,000 out of the £760,000,000 which formed the public debt, had stood in the beginning of the year at 102½, and of course a fair opportunity was presented of paying them off at par. Mr Goulburn was not slow in taking advantage of this auspicious state of things ; and he brought forward, on 8th March, a proposal for the conversion of the 3½ into, first, 3¼, and ultimately 3 per cents. The first reduction was to take place immediately, the last in ten years. By this means he calculated that he could effect a saving at once of £625,000 a-year, and in 1854 of £1,250,000. As this reduction was accompanied with an offer to pay off the dissentients at par, it involved no breach whatever of

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the public faith, and was received in the most favourable manner by both sides of the House, and the public generally. The result fully justified the Chancellor's expectations, for the debt held by the dissentients was a perfect trifle, only £200,000, and was immediately paid off. The success of this measure, whereby the old £5 and £4 per cents were at length, as in October 1854, reduced to 3 per cent, afforded the clearest demonstration of the erroneous principle on which Mr Pitt originally proceeded in borrowing so large a proportion of the public debt in the 3 per cents instead of the five or four per cents; for if the latter system had been universally adopted, the saving effected on the interest of the public debt, which at this time was £760,000,000 in round numbers, would have been, between 1815 and 1854, no less than two-fifths of the entire interest, or above £100,000,000 a-year.¹

¹ Ann. Reg.
1844, 153,
155; Parl.
Deb. lxxiii.
361, 365.

The financial statement made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer next day, exhibited an equally flattering appearance, which was hailed with the more satisfaction by the nation, that it was the first time during a long and dreary course of years that such a prospect had been presented to the public. The estimated revenue had been £50,150,000, the actual receipts were £52,835,000, showing an increase above the estimates of no less than £2,685,000. This was in itself gratifying, and the more so from its exhibiting such a contrast to what the budget had presented for many years past. But it became doubly so when the several items were taken into consideration, for they indicated, in an unmistakable manner, a remarkable increase in the comfort of all classes. The estimate of the property-tax had been £5,100,000; it produced £5,326,000. The duties on tea had produced £300,000 in excess, those on wine £350,000, those on sugar £200,000. The customs, estimated at £19,000,000, had produced £21,426,000. On the other hand, the expenditure had fallen short of the estimate by £650,000; and the East India Company had made a large payment

104.
Favourable
financial
statement
of 1844.

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1844.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1844, 154,
156; Parl.
Deb. lxxiii.
392, 399.

out of the monies received by the treaty with China, to be afterwards narrated—together the surplus of the present year, ending 5th April 1854, had been £4,165,000; an amount so large as enabled the Chancellor of the Exchequer not only to pay off the deficiency, amounting to £2,749,000, of last year, but to realise a net surplus of £1,400,000 for the present year.¹

105.
Reduction
of taxes.

With whatever satisfaction this unwonted financial statement was received by the country, it was very far from proving a source of quiet to the Chancellor of the Exchequer; for no sooner was the announcement of a surplus so considerable made public, than he was assailed by a perfect host of petitioners, each praying that the duties immediately affecting themselves should be taken off; while the class affected by the income-tax loudly clamoured that that heavy burden should be removed, as the war, which alone had been put forward as a ground for its imposition, had come to a conclusion both in India and China. Sir R. Peel, however, adhered to his principle of retaining the direct taxation, and remitting such taxes as were deemed advisable solely on indirect articles. Those selected for relief were glass, vinegar, currants, coffee, marine insurances, and wool. The entire amount of taxes reduced was only £387,000. This was loudly complained of by Mr Hume, who insisted that Government should forthwith make a large reduction in the army and navy, by which they would be able to remit taxation to ten times the amount of that proposed. But to this demand the Prime Minister made the following satisfactory answer: "When honourable members tell us that we ought to do away with the income-tax, I request them to consider what has occurred since 1835. Three things have occurred. There has been a rebellion in Canada, hostilities in Syria, a terrible disaster in India, and a war in China.² Let us not be told, then, that we ought to reduce, or that we can reduce, the income-tax. It is very easy to talk of making reductions, but the difficulty

² Parl. Deb. lxxiii. 405, 417; Ann. Reg. 1844, 157, 158.

is to show that, in the end, those reductions will consist with true economy or the maintenance of the national independence."

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1844.

The duties on sugar were made the subject of a separate debate, of great interest, as affording demonstrative evidence of the effect which, after a trial of six years, the emancipation of the negroes had produced on the productive industry of the once splendid West Indian colonies. It was stated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Parliament, that, before the Emancipation Bill, the West Indies had produced sugar enough for the consumption of this country, and about a third more which was exported, which had the effect of keeping down the price of the whole to the level which that surplus could command in the market of Europe. When emancipation, however, took place, it was foreseen that the supply would be considerably diminished, and to meet that probable event Parliament brought the duties on East and West India sugar nearer to a level. Experience had proved, however, that this change was not equal to the exigencies of the case, especially as the improved condition of the people in Great Britain, and our altered relations with China, rendered it probable that an increased consumption of sugar to mix with tea would take place. For this purpose he proposed that, after the 10th of November next, free-grown sugar of China, Java, Manilla, or any other which her Majesty, by order in council, might certify to be not slave-grown sugar, should be admitted at £1, 14s. per cwt., with five per cent additional, being 10s. more than the duty of 24s. on West India sugar. To this proposal the House cordially agreed, the necessity of the case, from the diminution of West India sugar, being apparent to all. Indeed, so strongly was it felt, that Lord John Russell moved an amendment that *slave-grown* sugar should be admitted to supply the deficiency of the West Indies, which was only negatived by a majority of 69, the numbers being 197 to 128. Thus was the first step in advance made to free trade in sugar ; but

106.
Reduction
of Sugar
Duties.

CHAP.
XLI.

1844.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1844, 162,
169; Parl.
Deb. lxxv.
154, 183,
219, 968,
1012, 1082.

it was an ominous circumstance that the House divided on the admission of slave-grown sugar on the same terms as that of free labour, and a strange one that the amendment to that effect was proposed by the leader of the Liberal party in the House of Commons. A subsequent amendment, moved by Mr Miles, on behalf of the West India proprietors, that the duty on British colonial sugar, whether from the East or West Indies, should be lowered to 20s., and the foreign left at 34s., was negatived only by a majority of 22 in committee, after it had been carried by a small majority against Ministers in the House itself.¹

107.
Bank Char-
ter Act.

But all the measures of this session sink into insignificance compared with the all-important one of the BANK CHARTER ACT, which came on during its continuance, and produced more immediate and important effects on the country than any other measure recorded in British annals. At the last granting of the exclusive privileges to the Bank in 1833, it had been provided that it was to last for twenty-one years, with a power of modification by Parliament at the end of ten years, if Government should be so inclined. Sir R. Peel resolved to take advantage of this permissive clause to place the issue of paper, whether by the Bank of England or country banks, under additional restrictions. The object of this was to prevent, so far as possible, the recurrence of such terrible calamities as the country had undergone in consequence of the fever of speculation in 1835 and 1836, followed by the crises of 1839 and subsequent years, and at once check rash speculation at one time, and undue suspension at another. In this opinion the country generally concurred; for the recollection of the distress recently experienced, and which every one saw was owing to something wrong with the currency, was too vivid not to inspire an almost universal wish that some remedy could be discovered for such multifarious and often-recurring calamities. The only parties that took the alarm were the country bankers and their immediate

dependents, who were apprehensive that the power of issuing notes, the great source of their profits, would be taken from them; and they issued several pamphlets on the subject, some of which went through several editions, and made a very considerable impression. Sir R. Peel, however, was too wary a leader to run directly athwart so powerful a body as the country bankers; on the contrary, he framed his measure in such a manner as ere long secured their general support. The subject was introduced by him in a long and lucid speech of three hours' duration, which was listened to with profound attention on both sides of the House, and never certainly was a subject of more vital importance brought under the consideration of Parliament.¹

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XLI.
1844.

¹ Mart. ii.
625; Ann.
Reg. 1844,
191, 193.

"In legislating on this subject," said Sir R. Peel, "it is first necessary to consider what is the principle of value, a point upon which there is not a uniformity of opinion. Some say it is a mere abstraction or measure of value, as a foot or a yard is of distance. I cannot accede to that opinion. In my opinion, it means, and can only mean, a certain weight of precious metal of a certain fineness; and the engagement of the makers of a promissory note is to pay on demand a definite quantity of that metal and fineness. This was just the state of matters prior to 1797, when bank paper became issuable without convertibility into metal. The reason why an ounce of gold costs £3, 17s. 10½d. is, that that is the proportion which the one metal bears to the other; and if you mean a certain advantage to debtors, you should give a direct discount, and not attempt indirectly to do the same thing, by saying it is worth £5. In a word, gold is the only safe foundation for the currency; and although the necessities of commerce may require that a paper circulation should be mixed with it, yet the currency can never rest on a proper foundation, unless the one is convertible into the other.

108.
Sir R. Peel's
argument in
support of
his Bill.

"I propose, therefore, with respect to the Bank of

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1844.

109.

Continued.

England, that there should be a separation of the two departments of issue and of banking, that there should be a separate set of offices for each, and a different system of accounts. I likewise propose, that to the issue department should be transferred the whole amount of bullion now in the possession of the Bank, and that the issue of notes should hereafter take place on two foundations, and two foundations only : first on a definite amount of securities, and after that exclusively upon bullion ; so that the action of the public would, in this latter respect, govern the amount of the circulation. There will be no power in the Bank to issue notes on deposits and discount of bills ; and the issue department will have to place to the credit of the banking department the amount of notes which by law the issue department will be entitled to issue. The banking business of the Bank, I propose, should be governed on precisely the same principles as would regulate any other body dealing with Bank of England notes. The fixed amount of securities on which I propose that the Bank of England should issue notes, is £14,000,000, and the whole remainder of the circulation is to be *issued exclusively on the foundation of bullion*. I propose that there should be a complete and periodical publication of the accounts of the Bank of England, both in the banking and issue departments, as tending to increase the credit of the Bank, and prevent panic and needless alarm.

110.

Continued.

“ With respect to private banks, I propose that the general principle is to be a distinction between the privilege of issue and the conduct of banking business, the object being to limit competition, but to make the great change with as little detriment as possible to private interests. To effect this object from the date of the act, no new bank of issue will be allowed to be constituted ; but all the existing banks will be allowed to continue their issues, *upon condition that they do not exceed their present amount*, to be calculated on an average of the

last ten years. While the issues are to be restricted, business will be facilitated. The privilege of suing and being sued in the name of the office-bearers will be accorded, and the power of an authorised partner to bond the whole in relation to the banking business, and no new bank established but upon application to Government, and proper registration of prospective and paid-up shares and capital. All banks are to be obliged to publish a full and periodical list of all partners and directors, and banks of issue to publish an account of their issues. The Bank of England will be allowed to extend its issues on securities beyond the £14,000,000 on emergency, but only with the assent of three members of the Government; and in that case the whole of the net profit on issues beyond the £14,000,000 is to revert to the Government. The "legal tender clause," making Bank of England notes a legal tender everywhere but at the Bank of England, is to be continued, as tending to facilitate the circulation of Bank paper. The Bank of England shall be bound to buy all the gold brought in, at a trifle below the present price.

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1844.

"By these means the circulation of the whole of England issuing on securities will be about £22,000,000, £9,000,000 being the proportion of the country banks to £14,000,000 of the Bank of England. The circulation of the country, however, is, and requires to be, £30,000,000, and it is the additional £8,000,000 that requires to be provided for. This portion of our currency must be based on gold, for it is the portion required for foreign commerce, in which national securities are of no avail. The gold wanted for this portion of our commerce *may be assumed to be at the utmost* £8,000,000; for before anything like that quantity could have been drained out of the country, prices must have fallen so low as to have caused a large exportation of goods and return of gold. As the provision of this Act is, that gold is always to be in store beyond the £22,000,000 based on national

111.
Concluded.

CHAP.
XLI.

1844.

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxiv. 720,
755, 1346,
lxxvi. 1061;
Ann. Reg.
1844, 191,
196.

securities, there can be no fluctuation in the amount of paper money otherwise than in proportion to the amount of gold brought for sale to the Bank of England; and as the Bank is obliged to buy with its notes all the gold brought to it, the gold bought in will be surely replaced by an equal amount of paper. When gold, on the other hand, is drawn out, the paper that comes in will be cancelled—a necessity, as the Bank has hitherto immediately re-issued the notes brought in, thus increasing the drain upon itself, at the very moment when a severe drain has set in of itself.”¹ *

112.
Argument
against the
Bill.

Such were the views entertained by Sir R. Peel and the great majority in both Houses of Parliament, which agreed with him on this all-important subject, and such the arguments by which their views were supported. So general was the concurrence in these views, that no one ventured to oppose them in either House on principle, and the second reading passed without a division. The only serious opposition which showed itself was to that portion of the bill which went to affect the interests of the country bankers, and the restrictions about to be imposed on their issues. Mr Hawes was the exponent of their views, and

* Sir R. Peel's resolutions were in these terms, which contain an able summary of his views on the subject:—

“ I. That it is expedient to continue to the Bank of England, for a time to be limited, certain of the privileges now by law given to that corporation, subject to such conditions as may be provided for by any act to be passed for that purpose.

“ II. That it is expedient to provide by law that the Bank of England should henceforth be divided into two separate departments, one exclusively confined to the issue and circulation of notes, the other to the conduct of the banking business.

“ III. That it is expedient to limit the amount of securities upon which it shall be henceforth lawful for the Bank of England to issue notes payable to the bearer on demand; and that such amount shall only be increased under certain conditions, to be prescribed by law.

“ IV. That it is expedient to provide by law that a weekly publication should be made by the Bank of England of the state both of the circulation and of the banking departments.

“ V. That it is expedient to repeal the law which subjects the notes of the Bank of England to the payment of the composition for stamp duty.

“ VI. That, in consideration of the privileges to be continued to the Bank of

he moved an amendment on the 13th June to the effect, "That no sufficient evidence has been laid before this House to justify the proposed interference with banks of issue in the management of their issues." "The object," said he, "of the present bill, is to make the paper circulation conform more closely to the gold circulation, which is declared to be prevented by the unlimited competition in the issue of paper. I deny that unlimited competition; for the convertibility of each note into gold at the will of the holder, is a natural and sufficient check on an over-issue of paper. There is no foundation for the doctrine advanced by the Bullion Committee, that the difference between the Mint and the market price of gold is the measure of the depreciation of the currency. That difference is entirely owing to the political causes which create a greater demand for gold, and therefore render it more valuable in one part of the world than another. It is a mere gratuitous assumption, wholly unsupported either by reason or evidence, to say that the difference is owing to over-issues. As little is the rise of prices during the war to be ascribed to that cause. On the contrary, England was in many articles, especially sugar and colonial produce, the cheapest country in the world at the very time

England, the rate of fixed annual payment to be made by the Bank to the public shall be £180,000 per annum.

"VII. That, in the event of any increase of the securities upon which it shall be lawful to issue such promissory-notes as aforesaid, a further annual payment shall be made by the Bank of England to the public, over and above the £180,000, equal to the net profit thereon arising.

"VIII. That it is expedient to provide by law that such banks of issue in England and Wales as now issue promissory-notes payable to bearer, shall continue to issue such notes, subject to such limitation as may be provided for that purpose.

"IX. That it is expedient to prohibit by law the issuing of any notes payable to bearer by any bank not now issuing such notes, or by any bank to be hereafter established in any part of the United Kingdom.

"X. That it is expedient to provide by law for the weekly production of the amount of promissory-notes payable to bearer on demand, circulated by any bank authorised to issue such notes.

"XI. That it is expedient to make further provision by law for the regulation of joint-stock banking companies."—*Parl. Deb.*, lxxiv. p. 755; *Ann. Reg.*, 1844, p. 196.

CHAP. when the market price of gold was 25 per cent above the
 XLI, — Mint price.

1844.

113.

Concluded.

“The effect of the Government plan will be to substitute small bills of exchange for promissory notes, thus establishing a currency more easy of issue and more dangerous than that which now exists, while any commercial crisis pressing upon securities will compel the Bank to draw in its notes by whatever means and at whatever ruin to private credit, and thus lead to commercial difficulties unprecedented even in 1825 and 1839. A drain of bullion like that produced by the bad harvests of 1838 and 1839, might close the banking department of the Bank, and lead to such distress as would force on the repeal of the Corn Laws. If all restrictions were removed on the issue of paper, save the one important one of its being convertible into gold, no banker could commit an over-issue, for it would come back upon him instantly if it exceeded the wants of the country. The notes in circulation now are little more than half of what they were some years ago, and no proof whatever has been adduced to justify the proposed restrictions. It is the most palpable injustice to lay the whole blame of over-issue on the private bankers, and restrict them in future to their present amount of issue, without saying anything of the Bank of England, with whom the system of over-issue always began.”¹

¹ Ann. Reg. 1844, 200, 203; Parl. Deb. lxxiv. 1346.

114.

The Bill passes both Houses, July 12.

Upon this debate, which went only to a subordinate part of the bill, and left untouched its leading principles, the majority for the Government was 155, the numbers being 185 to 30. A few small alterations in detail were afterwards adopted, but an attempt on the part of Mr Muntz, the member for Birmingham, to throw it out on the third reading was defeated by a still larger majority, the numbers then being 205 to 18.² In the House of Lords the bill excited very little discussion, and passed on 12th July without a division; so little was its paramount importance to all classes of the community under-

² Parl. Deb. lxxvi. 1061; Ann. Reg. 1844, 205, 206.

stood in either House, save by its immediate authors and promoters. It received the royal assent on the 19th of the same month.

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1844.

In announcing his measure regarding the currency, which extended only to England, Sir R. Peel declared his intention of introducing, in the next session of Parliament, a similar measure applicable to Scotland and Ireland. Early in the session of 1845 he proceeded to redeem his pledge, and the country was at that period eminently prosperous; and as no bad effects had as yet been experienced, so far as present appearances went, from the bill of the preceding year relating to England, the bill passed with very little discussion and scarcely any opposition. Sir R. Peel boasted, and apparently with reason, in bringing it forward, that "thus far experience was in favour of that Act; there had since been a period of extraordinary commercial activity and speculation, especially in manufactures and railways, and a great demand for capital; and the amount of gold and silver in the Bank of England was now £15,842,000." In pursuance of the principle of the English Act, it was proposed to withdraw all the present exclusive privileges enjoyed by the Bank of Ireland, and to oblige that bank, like all the other banks of issue in the country, to make weekly returns of the state of its business. In Ireland equally as in Scotland, the power at present enjoyed by the banks issuing notes was to be continued to them even below £5; but the amount to be issued by them was in future to be limited, so far as issuing on securities went, to the average of their note circulation for thirteen lunar months since 27th April 1844. Any excess of issue beyond these sums would require in both countries to be based on bullion. No bank established after the date of this Act was to have the power of issuing notes; and Bank of England notes were declared *not* a legal tender in Scotland. The amount of notes which under this Act might be issued on securities in Scot-

115.
Similar
bills for
Scotland
and Ire-
land.

CHAP. land would be £3,041,000, and in Ireland £6,271,000 ;
 XLI. the whole circulation beyond which was to be based on
 1844. bullion. Thus was Sir R. Peel's banking system finally
 established with almost universal concurrence in both
 islands, and the amount of circulation in the two, taken
 together, that might be issued on securities, was fixed at
 somewhat above £31,000,000, being little more than a
half of what it had been at the close of the war.¹

¹ Ann. Reg.
 1845, 203,
 204; Parl.
 Deb. lxxxii.
 374, 381.

116.
 Reflections
 on this de-
 bate.

It is difficult to say whether what was said or what was left unsaid, in these all-important debates on the currency, which ended in the entire establishment of Sir R. Peel's system, is the more calculated to awaken surprise and suggest reflection. The avowed object of the system was to check undue extension of the circulation, in periods of speculation and excitement, by the over-issue of bankers, and to provide a solid basis for any extension of the currency beyond what was deemed reasonable, by compelling it to be based, whether issued by the Bank of England or private bankers, on bullion alone. To effect this object, it was deemed essential to compel the Bank of England to take all the gold which might be brought to it at a trifle below the Mint price ; forgetting that if the precious metals came to flow on in abundance into the country, and no extraordinary drain existed from

* The Notes now issuable on Securities in the British Empire were :—

Bank of England,	.	.	.	£14,000,000
English country banks,	.	.	.	8,000,000
Bank of Ireland,	.	.	.	3,706,000
Irish country banks,	.	.	.	2,565,000
Scotch banks,	.	.	.	3,041,000
				<hr/>
				£31,312,000

In 1815 the Notes in circulation on Securities were :—

Bank of England,	.	.	.	£27,261,000
English country banks,	.	.	.	19,010,000
Scotch and Irish banks (estimated),	.	.	.	12,500,000

£58,771,000

—Ann. Reg., 1845, p. 204.

foreign wars or domestic deficiency of harvest to cause it to flow abroad, *it would all be brought to the Bank of England*, which would thus be forced to issue a corresponding amount of notes, and could only indemnify itself for the large amount of bullion thus kept in dead stock at its expense in its cellars, by forcing its business in every direction. Thus, to a certainty, an immense amount of notes would come to be issued by the Bank of England, and of course all other banks, at the very moment when it was least required, and most perilous in consequence of a large influx of the precious metal at any rate taking place into this country.

If what was said in support of the measure was surprising, what was left unsaid was still more extraordinary. It was not said that the currency of the country, irrespective of that based on bullion, was now fixed at little more than half of what it had been thirty years before, when the population of the country was only two-thirds, and its transactions *not a third* of what they had since become.* It was not said that the arbitrary line of £31,380,000, then taken as the limit of the notes which would be issued on securities, was to be a *fixed line*, admitting of no increase, even although the transactions of the country, as was the case within the next ten years, should be *doubled*.† It was not said that, the whole currency beyond this line requiring to be based on bullion, if that bullion was drained away from the country by any cause, as a bad harvest at home, or a serious war abroad, the necessary result would be a sudden and violent con-

CHAP.
XLI.
1814.

117.
What was
not fore-
seen.

	Population.	Exports. Official Value.	Imports. Official Value.	Shipping. Tons.	Exports. Declared Value.
* 1815	20,500,000	£42,875,996	£32,987,396	2,601,278	£42,875,991
1845	26,890,000	134,509,116	85,281,955	6,045,718	60,111,081

—*Parl. Returns.*

		Declared Value.	Computed Value.
† 1854	.	£97,184,725	£152,591,513
1855	.	95,688,085	143,660,335

—*Parl. Returns, 1856.*

CHAP.
XLI.

1844.

traction of the currency and destruction of credit, at the very time when undertakings the most vast, speculations the most profitable, were in course of being carried into execution. It was not said that, as the *whole currency* of the country, whether based on securities or on bullion, was convertible at the pleasure of the holder into specie, this contraction would of necessity arise *long before* the Bank was approaching the end of its coffers, and when it still possessed the means, save by the operation of this law, of sustaining the commerce and credit of the country. It was not said that, in this way, the credit of every person in the kingdom would come to depend, not on the prudence of their undertakings, or even the amount of solid realised wealth they possessed, but *solely on the retention of gold by the Bank of England*. It was not said that this retention for any great length of time had been rendered impossible by the system of Free Trade, which was simultaneously introduced, which, of necessity, induced an immense balance of imports over exports into the richer country, which would then become, as Spain had long been, not the depositary of gold, but the channel of its transmission to other states. None of these things were said in the Legislature, though they were loudly said in the country. It will appear anon what were the consequences of this omission, and by what providential interference the nation was for a time rescued from the abyss into which it must otherwise have fallen.

113.
Visit of the
King of the
French to
England.
Sept. 5.

Sept. 9.

An event, associated only with scenes of regal pomp and magnificence, but symptomatic of the altered relations of sovereigns and their subjects, occurred this year. This was the visit of Louis Philippe to Queen Victoria, in order to receive the investiture of the Order of the Garter, with which he was honoured on the 9th September. The ceremony was performed with great splendour in the Throne Room of Windsor Castle, in presence of the Queen and ten Companions of the Order, and a brilliant

assembly of the Ministry and Court. The few whom the magnificence of the spectacle permitted to reflect, recollected that this Order had been instituted by Edward III. after the battle of Cressy, and that its first Companions were the Black Prince and the other Paladins whose prowess proved so fatal to France at Poitiers and other fields of fame. How were times now changed! In answer to an address from the incorporation of Windsor, the French King observed: "The union of France is of great importance to both nations, but not from any wish of aggrandisement on the part of either. Our view should be peace, while we leave every other country in possession of those blessings which it has pleased Divine Providence to bestow upon them. France has nothing to ask of England, and England has nothing to ask of France, but cordial union." The 12th was the day fixed for his majesty's departure, but a violent storm prevented his crossing the Channel on that day, so that he was obliged to change his route, and proceed to Dover. On the route thither, a fresh disaster occurred, for when the train bearing the royal party reached the New Cross station, it was wrapped in flames, and the glare of the conflagration was reflected from the helmets of the escort. Those inclined to superstition drew sinister auguries from these incidents, so quickly succeeding the recent scenes of festivity and magnificence.¹

CHAP.
XLI.
1844.

If this visit was characteristic of the important and auspicious change which had taken place of late years in the relations of France and England, an event which occurred earlier in the year, though considered at the time as one connected only with amusement, was the harbinger of tragic and important events in the east of Europe. On the 1st June, the Emperor of Russia arrived in London, having been preceded by a few hours by the King of Saxony. He was received with her wonted courtesy and magnificence by the Queen, who gave him

¹ Ann. Reg.
1844, 112,
117, Chron.

119,
Visit of the
Emperor
Nicholas.
June 1.

CHAP.
XLI.

1844.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1844, 61,
64, Chron.;
Doubleday,
Life of Peel,
i. 381.

120.
Political
objects of
the visit.

a splendid series of entertainments in Windsor Palace. One of his majesty's first acts was to purchase £5000 worth of jewellery in London, which he distributed among the ladies of his acquaintance, whose smiles were liberally bestowed in return for such imperial courtesy ; and the favour of the sporting world was not less won by a gift of a cup of uncommon splendour, to be annually run for at Ascot races. Every one who approached him was struck with the manly dignity of his figure, his noble and serene countenance, and the polished courtesy of his manners, which threw a lustre even over the stately halls of Windsor.¹

Unmarked amidst the blaze of magnificence which accompanied this imperial pageant, political objects of the highest importance were involved in the Emperor's visit. It was not for the purposes merely of popularity or amusement that the Czar left the shores of the Neva to approach those of the Thames. The object was to prepare the British Government, in secret and confidential conferences, for the designs of Russia upon the Turkish empire. It was intended to unfold the pitiable state of weakness to which the Turkish empire was reduced, and the absolute necessity of the principal powers of Europe concurring in the measures to be adopted in the event which might ere long occur of its entire dissolution. What the tenor of these conferences was is not yet fully known ; but they may be inferred from what has since been published in regard to the proposals of the Czar to Sir H. Seymour, the English ambassador at St Petersburg. These were the cession of Wallachia, Moldavia, and Bulgaria to Russia ; of Servia, Bosnia, and the coast of the Adriatic to Austria ; of Egypt and Cyprus to England ; and the establishment of a power, under the protection of Russia, in Roumelia and Constantinople. Count Nesselrode's memorandum, published since the Crimean war began, leaves no doubt on this

point. What answer the British Government returned to these tempting proposals is not known ; but the event has proved that it was not such as to disturb the diplomatic relations of the two countries, or prevent the Cabinet of St Petersburg, when it deemed the proper moment arrived, from proceeding of its own authority to carry them into execution.¹

CHAP.
XLI.

1814.
¹ Count
Nessel-
rode's Me-
morandum;
Doubleday,
ii. 339.

CHAPTER XLII.

ENGLAND, FROM THE PASSING OF THE BANK CHARTER ACT IN 1844, TO THE FALL OF SIR R. PEEL'S MINISTRY IN JUNE 1846.

CHAP.
XLII.

1844.

1.
Public prosper-
ity and
the railway
mania.

SIR R. PEEL frequently referred to the Bank Charter Act of 1844, and the adoption of Free Trade, as the main causes of the flood of prosperity which overspread the country during the two succeeding years; and there can be no doubt that he was so far right, that the immense increase in railway and other speculations which then took place is in a great degree to be ascribed to the facilities for carrying them on which that Act afforded. The Bank, now laid in chains by Government, had but one thing to do, and that was, to attend closely to the state of the exchanges and the stock of bullion in its coffers, to expand its issues when the former were favourable, the latter large; to contract them when the reverse took place. Circumstances, immediately after the passing of the Act, were eminently favourable to the retention of bullion. The supplies from South America, in consequence of the cessation of the desolating war of independence, had become much more abundant, and the drain, from the fineness of the harvests, had become very inconsiderable. The produce of gold in Russia had now become so considerable* as to exercise a sensible influence on

* PRODUCE OF GOLD IN RUSSIA.

1837,	.	£900,000	1842,	.	£1,848,000
1838,	.	1,004,000	1843,	.	2,635,000
1839,	.	1,003,000	1844,	.	2,730,000
1840,	.	1,125,000	1845,	.	2,792,000
1841,	.	1,316,000	1846,	.	3,414,000

—*Parl. Papers*, Dec. 3, 1847; *TOOKE'S History of Prices*, v. 537.

the money market. The import of wheat in the years 1843, 1844, and 1845, was very small ; in the latter of these years, it was only 313,000 quarters.* The consequence was, that the Bank coffers were overflowing, and Sir R. Peel boasted, in the pride of his heart, as already mentioned in noticing the Scotch Banking Act in 1845, that it had bullion to the amount of £15,842,000. The necessary effect of this state of things, according to the existing law, was a very great issue of bank-notes by that establishment, which was obliged to give them for all the gold brought to its doors, and of course a corresponding increase in the issue of all other banks, which are all entirely regulated by the proceedings of the Bank of England. During the last half of 1844 and the next two years, the average bullion in the Bank was from £15,000,000 to £16,000,000, and the paper in circulation from £21,000,000 to £23,300,000. The entire circulation of the empire during these years was from £40,000,000 to £42,000,000, while the gold and silver was about £30,000,000. True to the principle of the Bank Charter Act, the Bank Directors no sooner perceived this favourable state of things than they lowered the rate of their discount from 4 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent ; and it did not exceed $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent till the beginning of 1847,[†] when the monetary crisis was commencing which termi-

CHAP.
XLII.
1844.

¹ Tooke, v.
563, 565 ;
Ann. Reg.
1845, i, 3 ;
Mart. ii.
627, 629 ;
Doubleday

* IMPORTS OF WHEAT INTO GREAT BRITAIN.

Years.	Quarters.	Years.	Quarters.
1842, . . .	2,997,302	1844, . . .	1,021,245
1843, . . .	982,287	1845, . . .	313,245

—PORTER'S *Progress of the Nation*, p. 140, 3d edit.

† RATES OF DISCOUNT CHARGED AT THE BANK, AND BULLION IN CIRCULATION.

	Rate of Interest.	Bullion.	Bills under Discount.	Paper out.
1844—Sept. 5,	$2\frac{1}{2}$	£15,210,000	£7,280,000	£21,210,000
1845—Oct. 16,	3	14,190,000	13,500,000	23,380,000
„ —Nov. 6,	$3\frac{1}{2}$	13,720,000	13,620,000	22,890,000
1846—Aug. 27,	3	16,360,000	11,840,000	21,310,000

—TOOKE *On Prices*, v. 565.

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XLII.

1844.

nated so fatally in the close of that year. It was impossible that so great a fall in the rate of discount, and so great an increase in the circulating medium, could take place without a corresponding rise of prices in everything except food, which was kept down by the fine harvests; the state of things of all others most favourable to commercial enterprise and speculation of every kind.

2.
The Rail-
way Mania.

The first effect of this state of things, as auspicious in the outset as it was perilous in the end, was a vast increase in railway speculation, and the growth of what has been not inaptly called the RAILWAY MANIA. It was during the years 1844, 1845, and 1846 that this system received its full development, and it was then pushed to a degree of extravagance which would not be credited by future times if not attested by a host of contemporary witnesses, and evinced by lasting effects upon the face and fortunes of the country. Compared with the fever which then seized the public mind, and the magnitude of the speculations in consequence set on foot, the famous South Sea Bubble, and the corresponding fervour of England in 1824-25 and 1836-37, sink into insignificance. The progressive rise in the price of the chief articles of commerce was such as to render speculation of every kind for a considerable time a source of profit, and to diminish to an extraordinary degree the unfortunate ones which terminated in bankruptcy. The result of this, as usual, was, that people thought that the prosperity which had now set in would never cease; that the rise of prices, which had proved so profitable to many, would continue for ever. It must be confessed, that for a considerable time appearances seemed to justify the anticipation. The few fortunate speculators who set on foot some of the favourite lines, soon sold their shares at such prices as in a few days enabled them to realise large fortunes.¹ The knowledge of this so increased the public anxiety to share in these profit-

¹ Mart. ii. 628; Ann. Reg. 1845, 2, 3; Doubleday, ii. 388.

able investments, that these shares rose every day higher, and scarcely any one who bought had not an opportunity of selling in a few days to advantage. Such was the effect of this, that in a short time the nation seemed to have lost its senses.

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XLII.

1844.

The effect of this universal mania appeared in a thousand different ways, some of which, it must be confessed, exhibited the national character in no very favourable colours. The passion for gain, now thoroughly awakened, seized upon all classes, pervaded both sexes, swept away all understandings. The grave and the gay, the old and the young, the studious and the volatile, were alike involved in the vortex. The few who ventured to withstand the torrent, and to suggest that the currency and capital of the country were alike inadequate to bear the strain which would soon be brought upon them, were put aside as mere alarmists, whose opinions were entitled to no consideration. It was said the money never left the country, that it only circulated from hand to hand with more rapidity, and that there was enough and to spare. Every one concerned, however remotely, in the great work of forming the network of railways which was to overspread the country, was worked to death, so great was the universal anxiety to get the lines forward. Surveyors with theodolites and chains were incessantly travelling the country in every direction; and when the proprietor refused his consent to their entry, it was stealthily obtained at night, or openly asserted in daylight by large bodies of men. Nothing could resist the universal mania. Park-walls were to be perforated, shady dells penetrated, gardens pierced through, stately mansions levelled with the ground, villages ruined, streets effaced, to make way for these gigantic precursors of human improvement. As the season passed on, and the 30th November, the last day for lodging plans with the Board of Trade, approached, the pressure and excite-

3.
Effects of
the mania
on society.

CHAP.
XLII.

1844.

¹ Mart ii.
630, 631;
Doubleday,
ii. 388, 389;
Personal
knowledge;
Ann. Reg.
1845,
Chron. 177.

ment became unparalleled. Lithographers by hundreds were brought over from Belgium and France to aid in making the plans; the engineers and their clerks sat up all night, and several of them in two years made large fortunes. On the evening of the closing day the doors of the Board of Trade were besieged by a clamorous crowd contending for admission, as at the pit doors of the opera when a popular actress is to perform: above six hundred plans were thrust in before the doors closed at midnight on 30th November 1845. The capital required for their construction was £270,950,000, and above £23,000,000 required to be deposited before the Acts could be applied for!¹

^{4.}
*Effects on
the public
mind.*

It may easily be conceived that so prodigious and universal a ferment in society did not take place without unhooking in a great degree the public mind, and bringing forward in the most dangerous way many of the worst qualities of human nature. The same effects on all classes which had been observed in France during the Mississippi Bubble, reappeared in Great Britain, but on a much greater scale, and pervading more universally all gradations of society. The passion for gain, deemed by all to be within their reach, seized upon all classes. Not a doubt was entertained, save by the thinking few, who were derided as alarmists and croakers, of the possibility, nay certainty, of reaching the goal; the only point was, who was to be first in the race? All classes joined in it: country clergymen and curates hastened to invest the savings of their scanty incomes in the golden investments; traders and shopkeepers in towns almost universally expended their all in similar undertakings; servants, both in affluent and humble families, were to be seen on all sides crowding to the agents' offices in the nearest towns, to throw their little savings into the crucible from whence a golden image was expected to start forth. It was painful to behold the extent of the delusion, mournful to contemplate its certain consequences. No class, not

even the very highest, was exempt from it. Ladies of rank and fashion hastened from their splendid West End mansions into the City to besiege the doors of the fortunate speculators, whose abodes were deemed a certain entrance to fabled wealth; the palaces of the exclusives were thrown open to vulgar manners and grotesque habits, to facilitate an entrance into these magicians' dens.

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XLII.
1845.

Doubtless some classes gained, and that enormously, by this universal insanity. The legislatorial attorneys, the engineers in chief employment, and the surveyors, rapidly made fortunes. It must be confessed they gave the public something very tempting in appearance, at least, for their money. There was not a line proposed that was not supported by the opinion of professional men of the highest character, to the effect that at least *ten per cent*, probably much more, would be the certain returns to the fortunate shareholders. Experience ere long proved that by doubling the estimated costs, and halving the estimated profits, a much nearer approximation to the truth would be obtained. Under the influence of such powerful excitements it may be believed that, without imputing to any one deliberate and intentional falsehood, great exaggeration prevailed; most erroneous views were successfully palmed off upon the committees, and a vast amount of solid wealth was for ever thrown away, to the utter ruin of great numbers of innocent persons. These truths were ere long too clearly demonstrated by the result. It was computed that no less than £16,000,000 was expended in surveys, legislation, or litigation connected with the bills got up during the railway mania before they got through Parliament; of the £300,000,000 in round numbers which the lines were computed to cost, nearly a third has never paid anything in the shape of dividend, and on the remaining two-thirds the net receipts,¹ after deducting the

5.
Its immediate benefits to some classes.

¹ Porter, 3d edit., 324, 326; Mart. ii. 631; Doubleday, ii. 388, 389.

CHAP. XLII. working expenses, would not on an average exceed 3 per cent.*

1845.
6.
Great effect of these speculations in the country.

It would be well if the historian had only to record the immediate losses which arose to the parties concerned in them from these gigantic undertakings. But unfortunately the evil did not stop here; but, on the contrary, has impressed its mark in a lasting way on the national character and on the estimation in which the Legislature is held. From the extravagant speculations and unbounded gains and losses of the years during which the mania lasted, may be dated a great change, and

* The Sums authorised to be expended by Acts of Parliament on Railways in the United Kingdom were as follows in the undermentioned years:—

1843, . . .	£3,861,285	1847, . . .	£40,397,395
1844, . . .	17,870,361	1848, . . .	14,620,471
1845, . . .	60,824,088	1849, . . .	3,155,332
1846, . . .	162,026,224	In 7 years, .	£302,755,221

The entire Receipts from and numbers of travellers on these lines, from which nearly one-half required to be deducted for working expenses, were,—

Years.	Gross Receipts.	Number of Passengers.
1845, . . .	£6,209,714	33,791,253
1846, . . .	7,565,569	43,790,793
1847, . . .	8,510,886	51,352,163
1848, . . .	9,993,532	57,965,070
1849, . . .	11,200,901	60,398,159

The number of Lines completed in these railways was in 1850,—

	Miles.
England,	4656
Scotland,	846
Ireland,	494
	<hr/> 5996

The Parliamentary Expenses incurred in getting some of the principal of these lines were,—

Great Western, . . .	£89,197	London & S. Western, .	£41,467
London and Birmingham, .	72,868	Manchester and Leeds, .	49,166
Northern and Eastern, .	74,166	Sheffield and Manchester, .	31,473
South-Eastern, . . .	83,222	Glasgow and Greenock, .	23,181
Eastern Counties, . .	39,171	North Midland, . . .	41,349

These figures exhibit only the expenses incurred by the promoters of the bills, without those incurred by those who opposed them, which were often of still larger amount.—*Parl. Report*, July 10, 1850; PORTER, 326, 334, 3d edit.

one materially for the worse, in the mercantile character of the country. The old English merchant, cautious, upright, honourable, lavish in his charities, economical in his household, liberal to others, saving upon himself, has disappeared. “*Namque avaritia fidem, probitatem ceterasque artis bonas subvortit; pro his superbiam, crudelitatem, Deos negligere, omnia venalia habere edocuit. Hæc primo paullatim crescere, interdum vindicari. Post, ubi contagio quasi pestilentia invasit civitas immutata.*”¹ In the joint-stock companies which succeeded the individual direction of the old English merchant, facilities to fraud were multiplied, inducements to probity taken away. Forgery and embezzlement hoped for evasion in the careless management of the many; honesty and integrity lost their appropriate reward by their fruits being shared by numbers. Every species of fraud—false balance-sheets, false dividends, cooked accounts—was perpetrated, in some cases with long-continued concealment and immense profits. When at length the perpetrators of the iniquity had in general escaped, aware of what was coming, they had in time disposed of their shares to the widow and the orphan, who, deceived by their representations, bore the penalty of their sins. The *transferable* nature of the shares in those public companies added immensely to the facilities of fraud, for the shares could be disposed of before the fraud was discovered. Unfortunately the Legislature itself did not in the general whirl escape, at least in general estimation, unscathed; and the railway Committees, pressed with business, and distracted by opposite opinions from witnesses of equal respectability and skill, gave such various and contradictory decisions, that the public confidence in the wisdom and disinterestedness of their legislation was, for the time at least, seriously impaired.

Another consequence of a very curious and unexpected kind arose from the rise and extraordinary extension of

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1845.

¹ Sal. Cat.,
§ 10.

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1845.

7.

Division in
the landed
interest oc-
casioned by
the railway
mania.

railway speculation in Great Britain at this time, and this was the division on a vital question which it occasioned in the landed interest. The first step taken by every railway company, when any new line was to be set on foot, was to endeavour to conciliate the landed proprietors through whose estates it was to pass, and this they did by offering them shares of the new undertaking, and ample sums in name of damages for the ground taken. *If neither bait took, and a squire proved obdurate, he generally got such ample damages from the juries, who deemed the railway funds inexhaustible, as entirely opened his eyes and altered his views as to the comparative merit of the railway and landed interest.* In this way a most important object was gained, attended with decisive effects in the great contest which immediately after ensued. The landed interest, hitherto so united, was *divided*; a considerable portion of it came to regard its interests as more identified with the railways—that is, the commercial interest—rather than with the fields—that is, the agricultural. It was the constant argument of the Anti-Corn-Law League that the repeal of the laws protecting agriculture would immensely augment the internal traffic of the country, and that between the effects of large quantities of grain coming in, and still larger of minerals and manufactures going out, an unlimited amount of carriage on the railways might with confidence be anticipated. There can be no question that these views were, in fact, at least well founded; and being presented to a generation heated by the railway mania, and the very persons most likely in the first instance to profit by it, they proved with many landed proprietors extremely serviceable. Their interests as claimants on railways or owners of their shares overbalanced their interests as proprietors of the soil. Thus at the very time when the universal distress arising from five bad seasons in succession had engendered a powerful league, which was making unheard-of efforts to

abolish every remnant of protection to agriculture, an element to seduction was thrown among its defenders, which caused many of them at the decisive moment to disappear from the ranks in which they had hitherto been found.

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XLIII.
1845.

The immediate effect of the vast expenditure of capital upon domestic undertakings, which the railway mania occasioned, was immense. The demand for labourers was such, that even the multitudes of workmen who came over from the neighbouring island, to the number at one time of nearly a million, were unable to satisfy it. Wages of all kinds rose to nearly double their former amount. Common day-labourers, instead of eighteen pence, were getting half-a-crown and three shillings a-day; colliers and iron-miners six or seven shillings, instead of three shillings and sixpence or four shillings.* The price of all the materials used in railways, especially iron, rose to an extravagant height; in December 1846 it was at £12 a ton, more than double its former price. The immense sums circulated in wages augmented to a very great

8.
Good effects
of the rail-
way mania
on the la-
bouring
classes.

* The following figures, quoted by Sir R. Peel, in his address to the electors of Tamworth, prove the great effect of the railway expenditure in ameliorating the condition and enlarging the consumption of the people:—

Articles Consumed.	1841.	1846.
Cocoa, . . . lb.	1,930,764	2,962,327
Coffee, . . . do.	28,420,980	36,781,391
Currants, . . . cwt.	190,071	359,315
Rice, . . . do.	245,887	466,961
Pepper, . . . lb.	2,750,790	3,297,431
Sugar, . . . cwt.	4,065,971	5,231,845
Molasses, . . . do.	402,422	582,665
Tea, . . . lb.	36,681,877	46,728,208
Tobacco and Snuff, . . do.	22,308,385	27,001,908
Brandy, . . . gallons.	1,165,137	1,515,954
Geneva, . . . do.	15,404	40,211
British Spirits, . . do.	20,642,333	23,122,581
Malt charged with duty, bushels,	36,164,446	41,979,000

—Sir R. Peel to Electors of Tamworth, July 1847.—*Peel's Memoirs*, ii. p. 104.

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1845.

¹ Porter,
646, 658;
Tooke on
Prices, 418.

9.
Effects of
the railway
system on
commerce
and manu-
factures.

degree the consumption of butcher-meat, beer, tea, sugar, and all articles of wearing apparel, which diffused prosperity through the dealers in these articles. The shuttle and the hammer rang merrily; joy and gladness for a brief space pervaded the land. This state of general prosperity was attended, as is always the case, with one result, at which every friend of mankind must rejoice, a sensible diminution of crime.* This is generally, it may be said always, the consequence of a state of prosperity and a general increase in the demand for labour. It arises in some degree, without doubt, from the lessening of the number of those unhappy persons who are forced by actual want and suffering into the commission of crime. But in many more instances it is to be ascribed to the giving the working classes, generally speaking, *full occupation*; a more effectual antidote against crime, in all ranks of society, than any other which human wisdom has ever yet devised.¹

In one respect the general adoption of the railway system in the British Islands has proved a lasting benefit, especially to the commercial and manufacturing classes. It has in a manner brought the different workshops of the empire together, and enabled each to obtain in an incredibly short space of time, and at a comparatively trifling expense, what it requires from the other. Immense is the advantage thence accruing to all the branches of manufacture; so great, indeed, as to have lengthened the start, already sufficiently great, which Great Britain had

* COMMITTALS IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND IRELAND.

Years.	England.	Scotland.	Ireland.
1842.	31,309	4,189	21,186
1843.	29,591	3,615	20,126
1844.	26,542	3,575	19,448
1845.	24,303	3,537	16,696
1846.	25,107	4,069	18,492

acquired over other nations in these respects. To the agriculturists also, especially in distant localities, it has proved a very great benefit, by bringing them in a manner much nearer their principal markets, and enabling butcher-meat and dairy produce of every kind to be brought even from the most distant places to the metropolis and great towns; while the inhabitants there have been equally benefited, by the lessened price at which these articles can be purchased. In one respect, however, it has been attended by a consequence by no means equally satisfactory, and which has already come to exercise an important influence upon the political balance and future destinies of the State. It has enormously increased the inhabitants and wealth, and in a proportional degree augmented the political preponderance, of the great towns. The metropolis and the great commercial and manufacturing towns having become so easy of access, the concourse of the inhabitants of the country to the vast emporiums of industry, wealth, and pleasure, has been increased to an unprecedented degree. The chief purchases, even by the inhabitants of the most distant counties, are now made in them. Their wealth and population in consequence are rapidly augmenting, while the small towns are declining, and in many of the rural districts the numbers of the people are rapidly diminishing. London is now adding 60,000 souls annually to its numbers; Glasgow, Liverpool, and Manchester from 10,000 to 12,000 each; while from the agricultural districts of Ireland 2,000,000 human beings have emigrated during the last twelve years. This is a most serious consideration, for it augments the resemblance, in many respects so close, between the state and prospects of society in the British Islands, and that which characterised Italy and Greece in the declining days of the Roman Empire.

In one respect the railway system has bequeathed a great and enduring benefit to the species, which will sur-

HISTORY OF EUROPE.

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1845.

10.

Beneficial
effect of the
railway sys-
tem on the
working
classes.

vive the empire which gave it birth. It has brought to the inhabitants of the towns the means of going to the country, and to the inhabitants of the country the means of going into the towns. "Railways," says Miss Martineau, "were to run not only along the margin of the southern part of the island, and round the margin of the misty Scottish mountains, but through the vale in which Furness Abbey had hitherto stood shrouded, and among old cathedrals, of which the traveller might see half-a-dozen in a day. It was on Easter Monday 1844 that excursion trips with return tickets were first heard of. Here began the benefits of cheap pleasure-trips to the hard workers of the nation. The process had begun from which incalculable blessings were to accrue to the mind, morals, and manners of the people. From this time the exclusive class was to meet the humbler classes face to face. The peer, and the manufacturer, and the farmer, were henceforth to meet and talk in the railway carriage, and have a chance of understanding each other. The proud were to part with some of their prejudice, and the ignorant with some of their ignorance; and other walls of partition than park enclosures were to be thrown down. The operative was to see new sights hitherto quite out of his reach—the ocean, the mountain, the lake, and old ruins, and new inventions; and the London artisan was ere long to live within sight of trees and green fields, and yet go to his work every day. As unwholesome streets in London were pulled down, hamlets were to arise at a little distance in the country, from which the humbler classes could go and return to their daily labour in the centre of the town. The diet of millions was to be improved, fish and foreign fruits being conveyed from the town into the country, and milk, butter, and vegetables, fresh from the country, into the towns.¹ Everybody's wants were to become known by the general communication about to be

¹ Mart. ii.
628, 629.

established, and the supply was to reach the want and the wish. The change was vast, the prospect magnificent; but this change, like every other, had to pass at its outset through a wilderness of difficulties."¹

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1845.

It can hardly be supposed that a statesman so experienced as Sir R. Peel was really deceived by the flattering and fallacious appearances which the effects of the railway mania at first exhibited, or that he imagined present prospects were to be perpetual. Certain it is, however, that he acted as if he believed this really was to be the case. Carried away by the tumult of activity and temporary prosperity which pervaded the country, he did everything in his power, both as an individual and the head of the Government, to swell the mania in which it originated. By the existing rules of Parliament, a tenth of the estimated expense of every railway required to be deposited before the bill for promoting it was introduced. A committee was appointed to consider the subject in 1844, and it recommended that the deposit-money should be reduced a half, or to a twentieth, which was immediately made the foundation of a bill which obtained the sanction of Parliament in the same session. To this great concession in favour of speculation, the vast increase in it which so soon after took place, and the unbounded effects which thence arose, is in a great measure to be ascribed. The general fervour on the subject was ere long still farther inflamed by the imposing ceremony which took place at the commencement of the Trent Valley Railway, when Sir R. Peel in person, with a silver trowel, turned up the first sod, which was followed by the most enthusiastic speeches on the unbounded prospects which these undertakings were to open to the country.¹

11.
Bill passes
reducing
railway de-
posits to a
half.

¹ Double-day, ii. 390; Parl. Deb. lxxiii. 516, 519; Ann. Reg. 1845, 178; Mart. ii. 629.

To appreciate the immense effect this reduction in the sums required as deposits to be paid had in stimulating these extraordinary undertakings, it is only necessary

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1845.

12.

Its vast effect in stimulating these undertakings.

to refer to the official account of the railways, for which plans were deposited in terms of the Act of Parliament up to the 31st December 1845. The number of these lines for which plans were lodged was, in 1844, 248 ; but in 1845 it had risen to the enormous amount of 815 ! The sums deposited on the lines in the first year were £6,432,155, and the estimated sums to complete the undertakings were £44,927,000. In the succeeding year, however, the capital required to be paid on deposits for new projects was £59,136,000 ; the sum of £60,927,000 had been already expended on the lines in the course of execution ; and the liabilities connected with the new projects, after deducting the deposits paid, amounted to the enormous and almost fabulous sum of £590,447,000 ! It is difficult to say to what state the country would have been reduced if these wild speculations had all been carried into execution ; and nothing can illustrate so strongly the extreme peril of the course on which Government had now adventured, in first passing a Bank Charter Act, which in effect compelled the Bank, and all other banks, to lower their discounts to 3 per cent, and then a Railway Act, which reduced the sums required to be paid in deposit on the projected lines from 10 to 5 per cent.¹

¹ Official Table, Ann. Reg. 1815, 178, Chron.

13.

Flourishing state of trade and the revenue.

Like many other rash and imprudent courses of conduct, however fraught with lasting and perilous consequences, the measures of Government at this period were attended by immediate and flattering benefits. The path which led directly over the abyss was in the outset strewn with flowers. The prosperous condition of all the great interests in the country was unequivocally evinced in the returns of its trade, manufactures, shipping, and revenue. The imports between 1842 and 1847 rose from £65,000,000 to £90,000,000 ; and the exports from £47,000,000 to £58,000,000. The revenue, notwithstanding a reduction of taxation in these five years

of about £6,000,000, which more than compensated the income-tax, had advanced from £48,500,000 to £51,500,000. The shipping in the same period rose from 4,600,000 tons to above 7,000,000 tons, indicating an increase of at least fifty per cent in the bulk and weight of the exports and imports of the country. All this took place not only without any increase, but with an extraordinary diminution, in our imports of food, which, till the disastrous years 1846 and 1847, which witnessed the Irish famine, had sunk to little more than 300,000 quarters of wheat a-year! It must be confessed that this extraordinary flood of prosperity, enduring for five years immediately succeeding a corresponding period of unmitigated adversity which had preceded it, afforded a just subject of congratulation to the Prime Minister, and seemed to warrant the confidence of the country in a statesman whose magic wand had so quickly converted desolation and ruin into riches and prosperity.*

Sir R. Peel made an adroit use of the flood of prosperity which, from a temporary cause, was thus poured upon the country, to carry out to a much greater extent than he had hitherto done the new commercial policy with which he conceived the well-being of the country was indissolubly wound up. He was enabled to meet the Parliament of 1845 in the most triumphant manner. The wisdom of his policy seemed to be established, beyond

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14.
Sir R. Peel's
favourable
financial
statement.

* EXPORTS, IMPORTS, AND REVENUE OF GREAT BRITAIN, AND SHIPPING AND POOR-RATES OF ENGLAND, FROM 1842 TO 1847, BOTH INCLUDED.

Years.	Exports Declared Value.	Imports— Computed Value.	Shipping.			
1842	£ 47,581,023	£ 65,204,729	£ 48,580,026	4,627,446	£ 4,912,498	1,427,187
1843	52,278,449	70,003,353	52,582,847	4,977,266	5,208,027	1,539,490
1844	58,584,292	85,441,555	54,063,754	5,297,168	4,976,093	1,477,561
1845	60,111,081	85,281,958	53,060,354	6,031,587	6,039,703	1,479,970
1846	57,786,875	75,953,875	53,790,138	6,314,571	4,954,204	1,372,089
1847	58,842,377	90,921,866	51,546,265	7,983,163	5,298,787	1,721,356

-PORTER'S *Progress of the Nation*, pp. 356, 399, 475, 94, 90.

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the possibility of doubt, by the result. Instead of the woe-ful tale of a deficit, which under the administration of his predecessors had so often sickened the heart of the nation, he was to come forward with the glad tidings of a large surplus. Supposing, he said, the property-tax to be continued, the revenue in the year ending 5th April 1846 would amount to £53,700,000, and the expenditure would be only £49,000,000, even after taking into account an increase of £1,000,000 for the service of the navy, which he most wisely proposed. But as £600,000 of this surplus consisted of payments from China, which would only continue a year more, he would take the income at £53,100,000, leaving a surplus of £3,400,000 when the additional estimates for the navy were taken into consideration.¹

¹ Ann. Reg.
1845, 24;
Parl. Deb.
lxxviii. 455,
497.

15.
Continuance
of the In-
come-tax,
and repeal
of more in-
direct taxes.

“I now approach,” said Sir Robert, “the most im-
portant question of all, which is, how we are to dispose
of this surplus. I propose to do so by *continuing the
income-tax, and making a great reduction in the duties
on consumption*. I would not have proposed this if I
had not felt the strongest persuasion that by continu-
ing the income-tax it will be in the power of the House
to make arrangements with respect to taxation, which
will be the foundation of great future *commercial* pro-
sperity, and which will add materially to the comforts of
those who are called upon to contribute to it. In con-
sidering the taxes on consumption, which are to be re-
duced, the points to be taken into view are the weight of
the taxes which enter into the price of articles of general
consumption, those which press most heavily on the raw
materials which constitute the staple manufactures of the
country, the comparative expense incurred in their collec-
tion, and which taxes, if removed, would give most scope
to the commercial enterprise of the country. These are
the objects which Government have had in view, in the
selection of taxes for reduction, which I am about to pro-
pose. I do not propose to maintain any *considerable*

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surplus of income over expenditure; but in the conviction that the House will at all events maintain public credit, I shall propose a reduction of certain duties which are rather onerous than productive. First, to begin with sugar, I propose to lower the duty on brown muscovado from 25s. 3d. to 14s. On East India sugar of the same description, the duty to be 18s. 8d., and on free-labour foreign sugar 23s. 3d. The effect of these changes will be, I think, to lower the price of sugar 1½d. a pound at a cost to the revenue of £1,300,000 a-year. The export duty on coals I propose to take away altogether at a cost of £120,000. On the raw materials employed in manufactures, 813 in number, I propose to remove altogether the duty on 430, which will get rid of a vast number of troublesome accounts, and no small amount of expense; and release altogether from duty the important raw materials of silk, hemp, flax, certain kinds of yarns, furniture woods, animal and vegetable manures, and a great variety of lesser articles. The entire loss to the Treasury from these reductions will be only £320,000, and the relief to the country immense. The duty on cotton wool is to be entirely taken off, at a loss of £680,000 to the Exchequer. The duty on glass is from 200 to 300 per cent on the cost of the manufactured article, a burden which renders competition impossible with the manufacturers of France, Belgium, and Bohemia. I propose to take this tax off altogether, which will occasion a loss to the revenue of £642,000. These reductions taken together amount to £3,338,000, being within a trifle of the surplus of £3,409,000 with which the House has to deal. In consideration of these reductions, and of the benefit they will confer upon the country, I propose the farther continuance, for the limited period of three years, of the income-tax.”¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxvii. 463,
497; Ann.
Reg. 1845,
24, 26.

On the other hand it was contended by Mr Baring: “Sir R. Peel originally demanded the income-tax for three years as a means of temporarily restoring the

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1845.

16.

r Baring's
jection
it.

revenue, upon the promise that the tax, when this had been effected, was to be removed ; but what is the state of the finances now ? On the face of his own estimate the income in the ensuing year, if you deduct from it the income-tax and the Chinese payments, is only £47,900,000, and the expenditure £49,700,000, leaving a deficiency on the revenue, as it stood before it was laid on, of £1,800,000. This is a circumstance well worthy of consideration. You imposed the income-tax to close a deficiency and compensate a large reduction of indirect taxation, and after a trial of three years in a period of profound and universal peace, and when the public revenues during all that time have been largely benefited by the Chinese payments, the income has not recovered itself, and but for that tax the nation would be still in an annual deficiency of nearly £2,000,000. Your boasted surplus is entirely made up of the income-tax ; and, mark-worthy circumstance, the effect of the large repeal of the indirect taxes made three years ago has not been, as was predicted, to restore the revenue in other quarters, but were it not for the direct income-tax the Exchequer would still be in a state of lamentable deficiency. Sir R. Peel has calculated the surplus, even with the income-tax kept on, at only £90,000 ; and that excess, small as it is, rests entirely upon the supposition of an increased consumption which was by no means sure of being realised. We are told that the selection of articles on which the tax is to be remitted has been made on the principle of being able to take off the entire income-tax at the end of three more years ; but in proceeding on that supposition it is much to be feared he is repeating again the too sanguine anticipations of 'Prosperity Robinson,' who took off taxes to the amount of three or four millions, expecting that in three years the revenue would in consequence increase five millions.

"The facts by no means warrant these expectations.

Nothing is so fallacious in principle, or has been so often disproved in practice, as the assertion now so often repeated, that the only way to insure an increase of the revenue is to lower the duties. The contrary has been decisively established by experience ; scarcely an instance is to be found in our annals of a considerable remission of taxation being followed by such an increase of consumption as compensated the loss to the revenue. In 1816 the revenue was £71,900,000 ; taxes were taken off to the amount of £17,500,000 ; and in 1819 the revenue was only £52,155,000, showing a difference of £19,745,000 ; and proving that the other branches of the revenue, so far from having improved by this great reduction of taxes, had actually fallen off in the next three years by £2,000,000, even after deducting from the deficiency the whole amount of the taxes remitted. In the five years ending in 1826 the taxes remitted were £13,000,000, and the revenue was not restored by about £4,000,000. In the three years ending in 1829 the taxes taken off were £9,600,000 ; but even in 1839 the revenue had not recovered the loss by £4,600,000. Between 1815 and 1830 the taxes taken off were £33,000,000 ; and the loss to the revenue was £22,000,000. In the face of these facts, so uniform and so long continued, what ground is there for believing that the effect of the present remission of taxes will be different, or that increased consumption will now for the first time follow diminished duties ? It is too evident that the expectation is entirely illusory ; increased consumption will never compensate seriously-diminished indirect taxation, and if the House agrees to remit the duties on consumption now proposed for reduction, it is equivalent to consenting for ever to what he has himself called ‘ the dire scourge of direct taxation.’”¹

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17.

Concluded.

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxvii. 551,
554; Ann.
Reg. 1845,
38, 39.

So entirely were the views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in harmony with the ideas of the great majority

of the House that the bill passed, with very little opposition, by a majority of 208, the numbers being 263 to 55. This great majority was obtained by the junction of nearly the whole Liberal party with the adherents of Administration, leaving a small minority of decided Protectionists and Radicals alone in opposition. But although this financial project thus excited very little discussion, and was carried by so large a majority, yet it was a most unfortunate step in the financial history of Great Britain, and was the first decided announcement of the new commercial and financial system which was thereafter for a considerable period to govern the Legislature of the country.¹

Three things eminently descriptive of the vast alteration in the ideas of men, and the ruling principles of statesmen, are particularly worthy of observation in this debate and decision of the House. The first is, that by common consent the income-tax was now continued for three years longer, when not only had all the circumstances stated in justification of its first imposition ceased to exist, but the situation of the nation was the reverse. In 1842 the news had just been received of an unparalleled disaster in Affghanistan ; an expensive war was raging in China ; and Government at home had to contend with a yawning deficit yearly increasing, which at length had reached the formidable amount of £3,500,000 a-year. Now, the disaster in Affghanistan had been effaced by a glorious triumph ; the war in China had ceased, and its expenses been succeeded by a large tribute, which had considerably tended to right the British finances ; profound peace prevailed in every part of the world ; and so far from a deficit of £3,500,000 a-year existing, there was a surplus in the hands of the Chancellor of the Exchequer of exactly that amount. Yet the income-tax was renewed without any abatement ! The second is, that the large surplus which, for the first time since

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arl. Deb.
xvii. 634 ;
in, Reg.
15, 36.

19.
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1837, the public finances exhibited, was applied, *not* to the reduction of the *income* or other *direct* taxes, but of a variety of indirect taxes, considered as oppressive to the springs of industry, or as entering largely into the price of articles of general consumption. The third was, that no surplus whatever was reserved for the liquidation of the National Debt, the interest being provided for, and no more. The times were far distant from those when the House of Commons pledged itself, by solemn protestations in 1819, never, under any circumstances, to suffer the Sinking Fund to sink below £5,000,000. A new system of finance directly opposed to the former had been adopted, which worked as great a change in our national prospects as free trade did in our commercial; and that system consisted in the substitution of direct for indirect taxation, and the entire abandonment of the Sinking Fund.

The Sinking Fund had been so long ignored, in consequence of its almost constant disappearance, since the monetary system of 1819 was introduced. The National Debt, which in 1819 was £794,980,480, in 1844 was still £771,069,858—showing a diminution of only £23,000,000 in twenty-five years. In the twenty-two years ending with 1850, the sum paid off was only £16,547,000.¹ The nation had become accustomed to regard the reduction of the National Debt as, practically speaking, an impossibility; and therefore it was not surprising that the entire devotion of the surplus to the reduction of taxation by Sir R. Peel excited very little attention. But it is not so apparent how they so quietly submitted, in a period of profound peace and unexampled prosperity, to a substitution of a heavy direct for a comparatively light indirect taxation, and the reimposition of a burden against which the people had risen as one man at the close of the French war. This was no doubt in a great degree owing to the fact, that the income-tax, as now restored, reached incomes only above £150 a-year,

20.
Causes of
this great
change.

¹ Porter's
Progress
of Nation
482.

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whereas the former came down to £50, and the nation generally had no objection to a heavy load of exclusive taxation being laid on a body of proprietors not numbering in all two hundred thousand persons. Add to this, that the mercantile class, taken as a body, always advocate direct in preference to indirect taxation, for the simple reason that they can easily evade it, which the landholders cannot, and they hope that the diminution of indirect taxes will augment their sales and increase their profits. But the main reason why at this juncture the substitution of direct for indirect taxation to so considerable an extent was not seriously objected to was, that the effect of the cheapening system introduced in 1819, and rigidly carried out by subsequent Acts, had been to occasion so great a fall in the price of the articles of commerce, and the consequent incomes of the persons dealing in them, that a corresponding diminution in the final burdens attaching to them had become, in a manner, a matter of necessity. Thus the monetary system of Sir R. Peel was the immediate cause of the extinction of the Sinking Fund, the fearful reduction in the military and naval armaments of the State, the abandonment of protection, and introduction of free trade in its room, and the re-imposition of the income-tax, as a permanent burden upon the nation—effects so great and momentous as amply to vindicate the prominent place assigned to that system among the great springs of social change in those islands in the first half of the nineteenth century.

21.
Increase in
Irish agrarian
crime.

While Great Britain was thus engaged in the prosecution of changes consequent on the extension of the currency during the influx of gold under the Bank Charter Act, and the effects of the alterations were appearing in an entire change in the financial and commercial policy of the State, Ireland was fast relapsing into the state of savage barbarism from which it had been temporarily extricated by the influence of O'Connell and the preaching of Father Mathew. During the influence of the

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former the passions of the people had been kept enchained as by the arms of a mighty enchanter, in order to hurl them, like the force of a well-disciplined army, with accumulated force against the Government. Under the enthusiasm awakened by the latter, the funds, which hitherto had been wasted in riot and intoxication, were mainly directed to the formation and support of a fund destined to effect the repeal of the Union, and the severance of Ireland from the dominion of Great Britain. But although during particular moments of fervour such political or religious passions may prevail over the natural wants and instincts of our nature, no reliance can be placed on their exercising any lasting sway over mankind. The period of reaction speedily arrives, and when it does, the effects of the long pent-up passions, like the ravages of a restrained flood, are only the greater from the duration of the previous coercion. This truth was strikingly evinced in Ireland at this period; for the serious crimes for which persons were committed in 1845 were only 16,696, while in 1846 they had risen to 18,492, and in 1847, when the famine had begun, to 31,209.¹

¹ Porter,
696.

Sir R. Peel was deeply affected by the accounts which reached him from all quarters of the increase of disorder and agrarian crimes in Ireland, and the relaxation of the strong bond of coercion which had hitherto been thrown on the passions of the people by the influence of the Roman Catholic clergy; and he thought the means of restoring order could only be found in raising the character and extending the influence of the higher classes of the Romish clergy. He endeavoured, with this view, to extend to them, and to the community generally, the benefits of an improved secular and religious education. Impressed with these ideas, he inserted in the Queen's Speech in this session a recommendation to the Commons to consider the best means of extending and improving academical education in Ireland; and in pursuance of this suggestion, Sir James Graham brought in a bill on

^{22.}
Grant to
secular col-
leges.

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9th May for the erection of three colleges—one at Belfast, one at Cork, and one in Limerick—where the most ample means were to be afforded for education to all classes and all sects of religion. There were to be no theological professors in any of them; the object being to afford the means of secular education without religious distinction; but every facility was to be given to the establishment of theological chairs by voluntary means in connection with the colleges. It could not be said that this establishment was excessive in a country where there were 8,500,000 inhabitants, 400,000 children at the national schools, and as yet only one university—that of Trinity College, Dublin. The grant proposed, too, was very moderate, being only £100,000 to build the three colleges, and £18,000 a-year from the Consolidated Fund to keep them up. The bill passed, accordingly, by a majority of 177 to 26 in the Commons, and without a division in the Lords, and the colleges were established. Sincere but vehement partisans on both sides, however, violently objected to the absence of religious teaching, and the cry of “godless colleges” resounded alike in the Protestant and the Catholic ranks. Yet, however much it is to be regretted that circumstances should ever occur which render it necessary to separate religious from secular education, it is difficult to see what other plan could have been followed in a country so distracted by theological disputes, that each party would rather see their children ignorant than educated by their opponents; and although the new colleges have not been attended with all the success which was anticipated from them, their progress has been respectable, and they have undoubtedly conferred great benefits on the community.¹

¹ Parl. Deb. lxxx. 345, 366, lxxxii. 379, 1025; Ann. Reg. 1845, 141, 162.

Another measure, framed with the view of elevating the character of, and lessening the political danger arising from, the Roman Catholic clergy, was brought forward in this session, which excited a much more violent opposition, and is still the subject of deep regret to a large and influen-

tial portion of the community. This was an enlarged grant to Maynooth College, where the Catholic clergy were educated in the principles of their own faith. The original grant to this establishment had been £9000 a-year; but this was found to be altogether inadequate either to its necessities or the numbers of persons requiring education there, who, being almost all in the very humblest ranks of life, were unable to contribute anything to the expenses of the college. To remedy this defect, and, if possible, elevate the class both of the teachers and the pupils at the seminary, Sir R. Peel proposed to extend the Government grant to £26,380 a-year, to make provision for five hundred students, and raise the professors' salaries, so as to insure comfort and respectability to persons holding these situations. As might have been expected, this measure excited the most violent opposition among the zealous Protestants, and meetings were held in every part of the kingdom as soon as it was brought forward, in which it was denounced, in the most unmeasured terms, as a direct encouragement of Popery, superstition, and treason, both to the State and the Christian religion. The Dissenters over the whole kingdom cordially united with the Episcopalians in resisting the measure; and in some of the most violent meetings, it was proposed and carried, amidst loud acclamations, that the Prime Minister should be impeached. After many days of animated and protracted debate, however, the bill was carried in the Commons by a majority of 133, the numbers being 317 to 184. In the Lords, it excited also a violent debate, but was carried by a majority of 157, the numbers being 226 to 69. A protest was lodged by five bishops and three lay peers, on the ground that the bill "provided for the maintenance of religious error and opposition to the Reformation, and countenanced the notion that religious truth was a matter of indifference to the State."¹

By this bill the Roman Catholics gained the great advantage, the importance of which was not at first per-

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23.

Enlarged
grant to
Maynooth
College.

¹ Ann. Reg.
1845, 102,
140; Parl.
Deb. lxxxix.
33, 36,
lxxxv. 594.

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* 24.
Reflections
on this mea-
sure, and its
failure.

ceived, but ere long became conspicuous, which was, that the maintenance of their educational establishment, on a liberal scale, was thrown on the consolidated fund, and thereby withdrawn from the annual votes of Parliament ; and there can be no doubt that the nation gained also, at least in point of tranquillity, by having a subject exciting such violent passions withdrawn from annual discussion. Never was a measure introduced with better intentions, or more in harmony with the principles of an enlightened toleration, and yet its effects have been to the last degree disastrous ; and what is very remarkable, chiefly from its defeating the very object for which it was introduced. This is now admitted by every candid observer of all parties, religious as well as civil. It was intended to elevate the condition and acquirements of the Catholic clergy, and bring them more into harmony with the Government of the State, and it has had just the opposite effect ; it has lowered the standard both of their education and ideas, and rendered them more than ever the irreconcilable enemies of the Protestant Establishment. This has arisen from a cause which was never thought of by either the advocates or the opponents of the measure ; but which, when it came into operation, produced decisive effects, and that so naturally, that the only astonishing thing is, that it was not foreseen and predicted from the beginning.

* 25.
Causes of
this.

The cause of the failure is, that the young priests are now educated at home instead of abroad, and thereby become more impregnated than ever with the bigotry and violent feelings which centuries of dissension have engendered between the rival Churches in Ireland. Before Maynooth was established, the young men intended for the priesthood were all sent to St Omar, Salamanca, or some foreign university ; and it was the precise object of its institution to put a stop to this, because it was thought it brought the clerical youth under foreign ecclesiastical influence. It has prevented that evil, but it has induced

a much greater one—namely, the bringing them under the direct control of a body much inferior in acquirement, and much more inflamed in passion, than any foreign hierarchy—the Romish clergy of Ireland. Half a century ago, when the priests had all been educated at a foreign seminary, the Catholic incumbent of a parish in Ireland was often the best informed, and sometimes the most liberal person in it. It would be no easy matter to find such a phenomenon now. Educated at Maynooth, instructed by its local teachers, and contracted in their ideas and information to the narrow and impassioned field of Irish contention, the priests have become less informed, and, as a necessary consequence, more bigoted. Liberality, which was formerly advancing with rapid strides among them, has been almost entirely blighted by this calamitous change, and Great Britain has found to its cost that there is an evil greater than that of the priesthood being educated at a foreign seminary, and that is, being educated at their own.

A measure, which excited much less attention at the time than these fiercely debated Irish questions, but was attended with unmitigated blessings in the end, was the new Poor-Law Bill, introduced by Lord Advocate M'Neill,* for Scotland, which passed into law in this session of Parliament. Like England, and all other countries which embraced the Protestant faith, Scotland at the Reformation had experienced the immense evils arising from the suppression of the streams of charity which in former days had flowed from the walls of the monastic establishments. Left destitute by this calamitous change, in the midst of a rude and distracted country, the poor in Scotland were reduced to the lowest point of misery, insomuch that a great and comprehensive measure for their relief was in a manner forced upon the Legislature. This was done by the Act 1579, c. 74, which, nearly

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1845.

26.
Scotch Poor-
Law Bill:
History of
the subject.

* Now the Lord Justice-General—1857.

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contemporary with the 42d of Elizabeth, the foundation of the English poor-laws, and brought about by the same necessity, was mainly copied from the English statute, and fully imbued with its humane and benevolent spirit. By this Act, the poor, the sick, the aged, the indigent, the impotent, and those who have not wherewithal to maintain themselves, were declared entitled to legal relief; and the heritors in each parish were ordered to meet and assess themselves for their relief, the one-half to be laid on the landlords, and the other on the tenants.

27.
Causes of
the law be-
ing evaded.

It is impossible that words can be found indicating a more humane intention than those in this statute; but unfortunately the whole intentions of the Legislature were frustrated, and Scotland was left, practically speaking, without any system of parochial relief at all, in consequence of an unfortunate decision of the Court of Session in regard to the administration of it. Repeated statutes and royal proclamations had enjoined the sheriffs and justices to put the law into full execution; but the administration of it was intrusted, in the first instance, to the heritors and kirk-session, or churchwardens, of each parish, who formed a little court which was to sit in judgment on each claim for relief preferred against the parish. Unhappily the Court of Session took up the idea that this administrative body constituted a court of law in the legal sense of the word, and therefore that their decisions could be reviewed only in the Court of Session. Thus were the sheriffs, the ordinary judges of the counties, ousted of their jurisdiction in this matter; and as a decision of the Court of Session could not be obtained in less than eighteen months, and at a cost of at least £60 or £70, the review of that supreme court was of course, in the case of paupers, practically speaking, out of the question. Thus the heritors and kirk-session, the very parties who were to bear the assessment, were rendered virtually judges without appeal *in their own cause*. The result was that which ever has been and ever will be the

case where such an absurd anomaly in judicial procedure is permitted: they decided almost every case substantially in their own favour. They did not absolutely resist all claims for parochial relief, but they doled it out with so sparing a hand that, practically speaking, it was no relief at all. A shilling a-week to a widow with three or four children was deemed an ample allowance, and in most places even this pittance was refused, for in five-sixths of the parishes of Scotland, though they all abounded with paupers, there was no rate levied at all. So far had this gone that it was universally thought in England, and even believed in many parts of Scotland itself, that there were no poor-laws to the north of the Tweed.

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1845.

As long as Scotland was a purely agricultural and pastoral country, this state of things was not attended with the evils which might have been anticipated. The landlords were generally resident; the collections at the church-doors for the poor were tolerably liberal; and a strong feeling of pride existed among the peasantry to endure any privations rather than apply themselves, or allow their relations to apply, for public charity. But with the spread of manufactures, the increase of wealth, and the rise of great towns, this auspicious social condition of the people came to a termination. A large proportion of the poor in all the great towns were Irish, who were far from their relations and utterly destitute; and the habits of civilised life and frequent migration of the working classes from one place to another, rendered them almost all entirely unknown to the affluent around them when overtaken by misfortune. These evils, which had been long felt and bemoaned by the humane, though stoutly denied by the selfish, were brought to a climax by the long-continued distress in the country from 1837 to 1842, during which the poor of Scotland, almost entirely unprovided for, underwent miseries probably unparalleled in any Christian land, for they had the evils of civilisation without its advantages. Fortunately these evils, and particularly

28.
The evils of
this at last
become in-
tolerable.

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the connection of continued fever, as well as other epidemics, with the condition of the poor in the larger towns, at length attracted the attention of some members of the medical profession ; which was the more important, as some of the most benevolent members both of the clerical and legal professions, trusting too much to speculative views as to the causes of destitution, and less conversant with the realities of life in the lowest parts of our large towns, set themselves in decided opposition to any change in the old Scotch system of merely voluntary relief.* On the other hand, a variety of facts tended to prove, that in a complex state of society the system of voluntary relief is never sufficient to meet the increase of destitution, which the varying modes of human existence, and the powers of procreation granted to the human species, naturally involve ; that the increase of population, instead of being checked, as Malthus and others had supposed, by the increase of sin and misery, goes on in an increased ratio—under any circumstances admitting of human existence—as the examples of Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland too surely indicated, simply by reason of the habitual *recklessness of character*, and absence of all *artificial wants*, in people brought up in a state of extreme poverty ; that the natural result of this state of things is great suffering, and sometimes absolute destruction of great part of such populations, by famine and epidemic diseases ; and that this result is always to be apprehended when the richer members of such a *people are accustomed to think it wisdom and charity to withdraw their attention from such sufferings, and “ pass by on the other side ;”* and that in such a state of society the only security which experience has shown to be effectual for applying remedies to the *early stage* of such evils, is that which is given by making Christian charity a

* See particularly Dr Chalmers and the late Lord Pitmilley. See *Proposed Alterations in the Scottish Poor-Law considered and commented on* ; Edinburgh, 1840.

part and parcel of the law, whereby assistance may be *claimed* by those whose habits will otherwise inevitably degenerate into recklessness and profligacy, and systematic inspection may be depended on for counteracting idleness and imposture. Fortunately these evils attracted the attention of one who had the heart to feel, the courage to assist, and the ability to carry through, what was necessary to provide a remedy for them. DR ALISON, who had devoted benevolence unbounded, and talents of no ordinary kind, to the alleviation of the suffering with which he was surrounded in the city of Edinburgh, wrote several pamphlets, portraying in such striking and such truthful colours the destitute condition of the Scotch poor, that it at last attracted the notice of Government. A commission was issued, which took evidence and reported in favour of the change, and a bill was introduced by the Lord Advocate, founded on its recommendations, which, after encountering great opposition, at length passed into a law.¹

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¹ Ann. Reg.
1845, 201,
202.

By this bill the axe was so far laid to the root of the evil, as that irresponsible administration of the poor laws was taken out of the hands of the heritors and kirk-sessions, who had hitherto conducted it. A Board of Supervision was appointed at Edinburgh, with the able and accomplished Oriental diplomatist, SIR JOHN M'NEILL, at its head, to superintend generally the administration of the poor over the whole country, and with power, at very little expense, to fix the rate of aliment to be awarded to paupers. A power was given to the sheriffs to review the decisions of the parochial boards in admitting or refusing to put applicants on the roll, and to decide litigated points between parish and parish. Parish boards were appointed to be elected by the rate-payers above £5 a-year, who administered the whole poor-laws in the first instance, and various provisions were made for the maintenance of lunatics, the education of pauper children, for medical attendance to the poor, and building poor-houses

29.
Provisions
of the bill.

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1845.

in large cities. So far the provisions of the Act were admirable, and they applied a remedy where it was most needed in taking the irresponsible administration of the poor-laws out of the hands of the heritors and kirk-sessions. But in one essential respect it contained a grievous defect, which has been severely felt since. It said nothing as to the *able-bodied poor*, probably because, by a solemn decision of the Court of Session in 1804, it had been determined that the poor able to work, but unable by their labour to earn a subsistence, from high prices, were entitled to relief.¹ Had this precedent been followed, it would all have been well; but unfortunately, a few years after the new Act had passed, the Court of Session, having the English poor-laws and the French *ateliers nationaux* before their eyes, reversed their former decision, and held by a majority* that the able-bodied poor had no claim on the parish funds; and this decision was affirmed by Lord Truro in the House of Peers. The effect of this decision has been to establish a most painful and undeserved distinction between the situation of the poor in England, and Ireland, and Scotland; for while in the two former countries the able-bodied are entitled to relief when out of work, in the latter they have no such right. No words can exaggerate the disastrous effects of this state of things, in a country where so large a portion of the working classes are often thrown out of employment from the effect of commercial or monetary crises, and the strikes in the manufacturing districts, which render destitute thousands not concerned in them, but dependent on the combined workmen. A striking example of this occurred within three years of the passing of the Scotch Poor-Law Act;² for in the year 1847, while in England 1,626,201 poor were relieved, of whom 666,338 were able-bodied, and in Ireland above 900,000, in Glasgow and its immediate vicinity above 130,000 poor were out of employment, including the families of

¹ Pollock v. Darling, Nov. 19, 1804.

² Thomson v. Lindsay, Feb. 27, 1849, affirmed on appeal March 26, 1852; Personal knowledge; Forter, 94; Ann. Reg. 1845, 202.

* Lord Jeffrey, Lord Robertson, and Lord Fullerton, were in the minority.

the labourers, without any claim whatever on the funds of public charity.*

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* The statute law of Scotland seems to be noways chargeable with this anomalous and most distressing state of things, for it has declared the right of able-bodied poor to relief if destitute, as well as the aged, sick, and impotent, in as express terms as words can do, by the ruling Act on the subject, which was nearly contemporary with the 12d Elizabeth, which established the English poor law, the Act 1579, c. 74, entitled "For punishment of the strong and idle beggars, and relief of the poor and impotent." The lists directed to be made up for sustentation are, "all aged poor, impotent, and decayed persons born within the parish, or having their most common resort there in the last seven years, and who of necessity must live by alms. The justices are to inquire if they be diseased or whole and able in body, and thereupon to consider what their needful sustentation must amount to, and to tax or stint the whole inhabitants of the parish according to their means and substance therefor. And it directs that if the aged and impotent persons not being so lame, diseased, or impotent, but that they may work at some manner of work, shall by the overseers in any parish be appointed to work, and refuse the same, "he shall be put in the stocks." Again, the Act 1592, c. 272, ordains "that strong beggars and their bairns be employed in common work during their lifetimes, and the power thereof is granted to the particular session of the kirk." Again, the Act 1663, c. 16, authorises all persons having set up manufactories to apprehend vagabonds who shall be found begging, or who, being masterless and out of employment, have not wherewithal to maintain themselves by their own means or work, and to employ them for their service as they shall see fit; "and it enacts that the parishes where they have haunted three years immediately preceding their being so apprehended, and who are thereby relieved of the burden of them," shall pay to the persons employing them 2s. Scots a-day. And in a proclamation of the Privy Council, dated 11th August 1692, it is ordained that "if any of the poor are able to work, the heritors of the parish are required to put them to work according to their capacities, furnishing them with meat and clothes; and if any child under fifteen be found begging, any person who shall take him before the heritors and elders, and engage to educate him to trade or work, the said child shall be obliged to serve such person for meat and clothes until he pass his thirtieth year." In conformity with these enactments, the Court of Session solemnly decided, in the case of *Darling v. Heritors of Dunse*, 19th November 1804, that an able-bodied man, capable of working and actually employed, but unable, from the high price of provision, to earn a livelihood, has a legal claim to a rochual relief. This decision was held to fix the law to the effect that the able-bodied poor unable to earn a subsistence had a legal claim for relief; and so the law is laid down by Baron Hume, the highest legal authority in Scotland in recent times. The law, accordingly, was so applied by the Sheriff of Lanarkshire in 1848, when in that county 39,000 able-bodied poor were thrown out of employment, and, with their families, at least 90,000 more were in a state of starvation. The Court of Session, however, reversed this judgment by a majority, holding that the able-bodied poor, by the Scotch law, have no claim for relief either for themselves or their dependent children, though the parochial boards, if they think fit, are entitled to give such relief in these cases. On this decision Mr Nicholl, the able administrator of the English and Irish poor-law, observes: "To maintain the exclusion of able-bodied persons from legal relief in cases like those of Paisley, is practically to withhold it from the most distressed, who nevertheless must be supported in some way. May we not ask, therefore, whether provision ought not to be made for doing that with equity, and which will otherwise be done inequitably and with disorder—whether relief should not be provided promptly, efficiently, and fairly, rather

¹ *Adam v. M'William*, Feb. 27, 1849; and *Thomson v. Lindsay*, Feb. 27, 1849, both affirmed on appeal, March 26, 1852.

If ever the necessity and expedience of any legislative change was decisively demonstrated by experience, it is this great alteration in the parochial law of Scotland. Since the new law came into operation in 1846, the poor relieved have, on an average, been from 80,000 to 100,000,*

* TABLE OF POOR-LAW ADMINISTRATION, 1846-56.

Year.	NUMBER OF POOR.						
	Registered Poor relieved.	Registered Poor at date.	Casual Poor relieved during the Year.	No of Poor refused Relief.	No. of such Poor relieved under order of Sheriff.	No. of Poor removed to England or Ireland, or to other Parishes.	No. of Insane or Fatuous Poor.
1846		69,432	26,894				
1847	85,971	71,161	60,399	5,841	565	8,453	2945
1848	100,961	77,730	126,684	8,577	766	13,733	3480
1849	106,434	82,357	95,686	15,395	768	9,396	3574
1850	101,454	79,031	53,070	14,235	604	6,306	3421
1851	99,777	76,906	42,093	9,264	406	5,102	3520
1852	99,637	75,111	46,031	7,627	399	5,253	3634
1853	99,609	75,437	49,658	7,045	368	2,415	3787
1854	103,777	78,920	31,951	6,473	294	3,056	3893
1855	100,550	79,887	42,863	5,757	241	2,163	4292
1856	99,363	79,973	38,020	5,603	256	1,898	4467
Incr. Decr.	1,197	86	4,843	4	15	465	195
							335
Year.	EXPENDITURE.						
	Poor on Roll.	Casual Poor.	Medical Relief.	Management.	Law Expenses.	Buildings.	Sanitary Measures.
1846	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
1847	216,512	24,633	4,055	17,451	2,515	...	295,232
1848	336,515	36,340	12,879	43,156	5,022	...	433,915
1849	401,885	53,384	30,339	42,339	5,719	10,971	514,334
1850	417,462	51,470	33,010	51,804	8,519	14,775	577,044
1851	414,680	31,556	26,574	50,881	10,660	42,814	581,553
1852	404,218	25,917	20,311	52,069	10,872	21,576	534,913
1853	401,954	25,986	21,436	51,744	13,266	21,186	535,868
1854	411,135	24,114	21,737	52,352	13,036	21,644	544,552
1855	428,708	24,386	27,874	56,068	9,780	25,850	578,928
1856	461,213	27,356	27,166	58,767	10,290	20,605	611,784
1856	496,689	22,188	21,008	61,462	8,474	24,817	629,348
Incr. Decr.	25,416	5,167	3,158	2,694	1,815	4,212	17,563
	...	...	...	...	...	4677	...

—*Scottish Poor-Law Commissioners' Report, 1856, January 1857.*—It is a curious and apparently unaccountable circumstance how much more expensive the cost

being about 1 in 27 of the population, and the cost of their maintenance has gradually risen from about £300,000 to about £600,000 a-year, being at last about a tenth, or 2s. in the pound, on the rental of the country. Every person at all acquainted with the state of Scotland and the dispositions of its inhabitants, must be aware that this large number of persons has been relieved, and these unwonted sums expended, in spite of the most rigid economy on the part of the parochial boards in the administration of the poor's funds, and the utmost efforts to resist any increase in the expenditure. The increase arose entirely from the absolute necessity for parochial relief which invariably arises in every country when it reaches a certain stage in civilisation and manufacturing industry. It is painful to think that it was so long and unnecessarily delayed.

Two questions which strongly excited party spirit, but were of little consequence in a general point of view, came before Parliament during the preceding session. The first of these was a charge brought against Sir James Graham, as Home Secretary, of having, for State purposes, ordered some letters posted by two foreign refugees and from two English Chartists, to be opened. The charge, which was of a kind violently to agitate the public mind, was brought forward by Mr Thomas Duncombe on the 14th June, and Sir James wisely consented to the matter being referred to a select committee. In the interval between the question being mooted and the report of the committee, the utmost efforts were made by the Whig-Radical press to excite the public mind on the subject, and

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30.

Proof afforded by experience of the good effected by the bill.

31.

Charge against Sir James Graham of opening letters. June 1844.

of criminal prisoners is than that of innocent paupers. The cost of the Scotch paupers, from the above Tables, is from £5 to £6 a-head; and the English is just the same, the poor-rate being from £5,000,000 to £6,000,000 for the maintenance of 900,000 to 1,000,000 paupers. But the average cost of maintaining a criminal prisoner in Scotland is £16, 16s., deducting his earnings; and in Millbank Penitentiary it is £17, also deducting earnings. It is true, the prisoners for crimes are fed up in a way to which the paupers are strangers, for while the innocent pauper gets 38 ounces of solid nourishment in a week, the committed thief gets 60, the convicted thief 96, and the transported thief 160! This extraordinary fact is brought out in the very able and interesting reports of Mr Channing on the English Poor-Laws for 1839, p. 179.

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the clamour from one end of the kingdom to the other soon became excessive. Every one feared that his private correspondence would be looked into by the prying and inquisitive Post-office officials. But the report of the committee soon put an end to this clamour. From it it appeared *that* so far from being illegal, the opening of letters by authority of Government was expressly authorised in the Acts establishing the Post-office; that this power had been since repeatedly confirmed, especially at the accession of Queen Victoria; that it had been exercised often by Whig Ministers, and especially Mr Fox, in 1782; that from 1799 to 1844 the warrants for opening letters had been on an average *only eight* in the year; and that the power thus legally conferred and sparingly exercised was essential to the safety of the State, and the preventing foreign or domestic conspiracies. This report effectually calmed the public mind and silenced the Radical press; and the public satisfaction was increased by a statement of the Duke of Wellington in the House of Peers, that there was no foundation for the report that the thing had been done at the instigation of a foreign power.¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
1844, lxxv.
392, 985,
1330, lxxvi.
312; Ann.
Reg. 1844,
220, 222.

32.
The Alien
Act.

Connected with this was another subject, also disposed of in the same session of Parliament. The Alien Act had been little more than a dead letter for a number of years, chiefly in consequence of its containing no provision compelling foreigners to register their names, and of the number in consequence who avoided doing so. In 1842, out of 11,600 foreigners, known officially to have landed, only 6,084 were registered; out of 794 landed at Hull in that year, only one was registered; out of 1174 at Southampton, not one. In these circumstances, it was apparently not without reason thought that the time had arrived when the restrictions on aliens might be altogether removed. A bill to this effect was accordingly brought forward by Mr Hutt, from the Liberal benches, which enabled all foreigners at a trifling cost to obtain

letters of naturalisation conferring upon them all the privileges of British subjects, except those of sitting in the Privy Council or in either House of Parliament. So completely had the feeling against foreigners expired in Great Britain, and so thoroughly was the Continent thought to be pacified, that this important relaxation of former policy excited very little attention, and was scarcely noticed even in the public newspapers. And yet the world was on the eve of the Revolution of 1848, the almost entirely *bouleversement* of the Continent, and the Chartist insurrection in Great Britain!—so widely different is sometimes the under-current flowing in human affairs from what appears and attracts the attention of the legislature on the surface.¹

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¹ Ann. Reg.
1844, 27;
Parl. Deb.
lxxvi. 842,
845; Spec-
tator, 1844,
723, Mart.
ii. 635.

During the whole of 1844 and 1845, the efforts of the Anti-Corn-Law League to keep alive agitation in the country on the subject of the import duties on grain were incessant, and attended with the most important effects.

^{33.}
Progress of
the Anti-
Corn-Law
League.

It is true, a great part of the facts to which they had formerly so triumphantly referred, in support of their argument, had now slipped from their grasp. It was now evident that the high prices of grain from 1838 to 1842 had been owing to a succession of bad harvests, and that there was no reason to suppose that in ordinary seasons the nation could not, within its own bounds, supply itself with food. The harvest in this year was not particularly good, and the importation of wheat was only 313,000 quarters, and yet its price was only 45s. the quarter. But though deprived of the powerful argument for a free importation of grain arising from high prices, the Anti-Corn-Law League found a full compensation for its loss in the general prosperity of the nation, and the embarrassments in which, from low prices, the agricultural interest was involved. Their lecturers and itinerant orators, many of whom were men of great ability, skilfully turned this state of things to their own advantage. They represented the general welfare of the nation, and the high wages of labour,

CHAP. as the result of the application of the principles of Free
 XLII. Trade to all other interests; the depressed condition of the
 1845. agriculturists, to the retention of protection on their own.
 The farmers were everywhere told that the low prices were
owing to the Corn Laws, and could only be obviated by
 their removal; and, strange to say, this argument obtained
 very general credit. So far was the movement carried, that
 Mr Cobden, towards the close of the session, himself moved
 for a committee to inquire into the causes of agricultural
 distress, which was only defeated by a majority of 92 in a
 House of 334. It was distinctly proved by the Conser-
 vative members, from every part of England, that the dis-
 tress among the farmers from low prices was not light and
 partial, but general and severe—a state of things which
 the more reflecting among them ascribed to Sir R. Peel's
 new sliding-scale affording no adequate protection to rural
 industry.¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
 lxxviii 818;
 881; Ann.
 Reg. 1845,
 62, 69.

34.
 Division on
 Mr Miles'
 motion.

So general had distress now become among the agricul-
 tural interest, that Mr Cobden said in his opening speech
 on this debate, that one-half of the farmers in England
 were in a state of insolvency, and the other half paying
 their rents out of their capital—assertions which were not
 contradicted from either side of the House. A few nights
 after his motion had been disposed of, Mr Miles, a Pro-
 tectionist, moved that the surplus of the revenue should
 be applied to the relief of the agricultural interest, now,
 beyond all question, the most suffering in the community.
 The motion was negatived by a majority of 213 to 78;
 but in the course of the debate some observations fell from
 both sides, which showed not obscurely the changes which
 were approaching. Sir James Graham, on the part of
 Government, said, “So far from being sorry that a pro-
gressive increase of importation has occurred, I consider
it eminently advantageous; for, with the rapid increase
 of our population, many years will not pass away before
 we are in want of food, if we persist in refusing admission
 to foreign corn.” And Mr Disraeli said on the part of

the Protectionists: "Protection appears to be in about the same condition that Protestantism was in 1828. The country will draw its moral. For my part, if we are to have free trade, I, who honour genius, prefer that such measures should be proposed by the honourable member for Stockport (Mr Cobden), rather than by one who, by skilful parliamentary measures, has tampered with the generous confidence of a great people and a great party. For myself, I care not what may be the result. Dissolve, if you please, the Parliament you have betrayed, and appeal to the people, who, I believe, mistrust you. For me there remains this at least—the opportunity of expressing thus publicly my belief that a Conservative Government is an organised hypocrisy."¹

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¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxviii. 985,
1028; Ann.
Reg 1845,
71, 75.

These words on the part of the two leaders of the Free Trade and Protection parties, sufficiently indicated to what crisis the country was approaching—what the one party intended, and what the other apprehended. So evident had this become, that towards the close of the session nothing else was debated in the House of Commons but the Corn Laws; and the declining majority for Protection showed that the waverers were beginning to seek their own advantage in anticipating what they saw was to become ere long the measures of Government. On June 3, Mr Ward moved for a committee to inquire into the situation and burdens of the landed interest, which was rejected by a majority of 73, the numbers being 182 to 109. Mr Villiers, on the 10th, brought forward his annual motion on the subject of the Corn Laws, and it was negatived by a majority of 132, the numbers being 254 to 122. But on a motion by Lord John Russell to go into a committee on the state of the labouring classes, with a view to the repeal of the Corn Laws, the majority was only 78, the numbers being 182 to 104. In the course of this debate, Sir James Graham dwelt strongly on the great fall which had taken place in the price of all the chief articles of consumption since the new tariff came into operation;

35.
Farther divisions on the Corn Laws, and close of the session.

June 3.

June 10.

May 26.

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¹ Ann. Reg.
1845, 79,
213; Parl.
Deb. lxxx.
879, 1423,
lxxvi, 330.

and Lord John Russell declared he would not now propose a fixed duty of 8s. a quarter on wheat, but if called upon to say what it should be, he would fix on 4s., 5s., or 6s.* It was evident from these statements that the Corn Laws were doomed, and that it was only a question of time when they should be struck altogether from the statute-book. The session closed on the 9th August with a Queen's Speech, in which her Majesty declared the "cordial assent" she had given "to the bills presented for remitting the duties on many articles of import."¹

36.
The change
had become
unavoid-
able, from
the Mone-
tary and
Free-trade
system.

In truth, the state of the country, induced by the previous policy of Government, and the long adoption of the cheapening system, had rendered the extension of the principles of Free Trade to the commerce of grain a matter of necessity. Prices of all the articles of commerce and production having been reduced fully 50 per cent by the monetary system, and at least 15 per cent more by the reduced tariff, it had become impossible to maintain a system of heavy duties on the import of grain. When the prices of all articles of produce—that is, the remuneration of every species of industry—had been lowered above 60 per cent by the measures of the legislature, it became indispensable to lower, in some degree at least, the cost of the food on which the working classes were to subsist. The Protectionists were quite right in imputing the repeal of the Corn Laws to Sir R. Peel, but they erred in their opinion as to the time and the measure which induced the necessity that led to that repeal. It was in 1819 that the policy was inaugurated, which could not fail in

* FALL IN THE PRICE OF THE CHIEF ARTICLES OF CONSUMPTION, AS
REFERRED TO BY SIR JAMES GRAHAM.

Wheat had fallen from 61s. in 1811 to 46s. per quarter.			
Beef,	.	.	from 7½d. to 5½d. per lb.
Mutton,	.	.	" 7d. " 6d. "
Sugar,	.	.	" 7d. " 5d. "
Coffee,	.	.	" 2s. " 1s. 4d. "
Tea,	.	.	" 5s. " 4s. "
Currants,	.	.	" 9d. " 6d. "
Candles,	.	.	" 7d. " 6d. "

--Ann. Reg., 1845, p. 84.

the end to remove all restrictions on the import of grain ; it was by unanimous votes of the House of Commons, including the whole Protectionists themselves, upholding the monetary system, that Free Trade was in reality established as the policy of the country. When Sir R. Peel introduced his tariffs in 1842 and 1845, so materially lowering the import duties, he only yielded to the necessity which he had introduced, and Parliament had so unanimously approved. In proposing to the legislature the entire repeal of the Corn Laws, he did not adopt a new policy ; he only gave way to the necessary consequences of their own acts. Sooner or later, free trade in grain must have followed the contraction of the currency and free trade in other things. Some time might have elapsed before the change, in the ordinary course of events, became unavoidable, but meanwhile the hand of fate was on the curtain. Providence, in pity to human infatuation, was about to interpose visibly and decisively in human affairs, and those great changes were, on the eve of coming into operation, destined to apply a severe but merciful remedy to the miseries of Ireland, arrest the devastation of monied cupidity in England, give a mighty impulse to industry and improvement all over the world, and provide for the extension, in the remotest regions, of the dominant race among mankind.

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Planted originally by nature in the mountains of Peru, THE POTATO possesses the qualities which distinctly mark it as the destined food, in part at least, of a large portion of mankind. It flourishes in nearly every climate except the very warmest and the coldest ; more sensitive to frost than even the dahlia or geranium, it is to be seen in perfection in every region of the globe except the tropics or the arctic circle. During the brief months of summer, it makes its way and arrives at maturity in every part of the temperate zone. The roots, in their natural state, are not much larger than a strawberry ; under the fostering

37.
Advantages
and dangers
of the po-
tato as the
food

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hand of culture they swell to ten or sometimes twenty times the size. It is far more productive, when brought to perfection by cultivation, of food for the use of man, than any cereal; it yields, on an equal space, three times as much for his sustenance as the best wheaten crop. Like civilisation, however, of which it is the attendant and the support, it involves in itself the seeds of corruption in its latest and most advanced stages, which threaten calamities as great to the physical necessities of man, as the depravity which often overspreads a wealthy and luxurious society does to his moral. But the wisdom of Nature has provided a remedy for the one as well as the other: like the human race, the succulent and prolific root can be propagated by seminal descent as well as by the transplantation of slips, and a new and untainted race be induced by the planting of fresh seeds in a region where the former race has been degraded by a long course of artificial culture.*

For a great number of years back the symptoms of the disease to which the potato, in the more advanced stages of its cultivation, is more particularly subject, had appeared in most parts both of Great Britain and Ireland; and in

* "This predisposition to disease in the potato, results, I conceive, from its having *degenerated*, in consequence of its having been subjected to a long course of artificial cultivation. The potato, in common with all other cultivated productions of the vegetable world, has a tendency to degenerate when the laws of nature are departed from; and as it is not a native of this country, it degenerates in proportion as the means to prevent its doing so have been neglected. Nature, however, has provided for the permanent health as well as productiveness of her offspring in the *seed* contained in the berry which the plant produces from its stalks. Hence, when we endeavour to perpetuate any particular kind of potato, by continually cutting and planting its tubers, it may reasonably be expected that we shall injure its general properties and powers, and thus gradually render it less fit for frost, and more liable to disease. And long experience has convinced me that the taint far more frequently attacks the long-cultivated and more delicate sorts of potatoes than any others; the former, I conceive, because the vegetative powers have become disordered and enfeebled by a long course of treatment opposed to nature. In 1833 I raised from the berry a great variety of new sorts. In 1834 the best were selected and planted separately. At the present time, though planted late, and cut, they display an extraordinary degree of health and vigour; while beside them, in the same field, some of the old sorts are not only feeble, but tainted and curled."—*Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*.

the latter country, where it constituted the staple food of the people, it had occasioned very great uneasiness and distress. The terrible scarcities, bordering on famine, in the Emerald Isle in 1823, 1837, and 1840, had been mainly owing to this cause. It had always been observed that the disease was most rife in the richest soils, and in wet or stormy seasons. Frequent thunderstorms, and an electrical state of the atmosphere, had been generally found to precede the spread of the devastating malady. Its frequent recurrence and alarming symptoms in bad seasons had excited the attention of the observers of nature, and the most sagacious of these had already recorded the opinion that the root was wearing itself out, and that it *would not last twenty years*.* But in the summer and autumn of 1845 these symptoms manifested themselves in a far more alarming manner. The rains began early that season, and, contrary to what is usually the case, the ground was soaked by the end of July; but it was not till near the middle of the succeeding month that they set in with great severity. Then was seen what, under the existing monetary system, three weeks' rain in August can do in the British Isles. Hardly had the Parliament separated on the 9th August, amidst general congratulations for the past, and the warmest anticipations for the future, when the heavens seemed

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38.

First appearance
of the potato
rot.

* Talking with Dr Smith on the condition of Ireland in summer 1834, Mr Cobbett said: "The dirty weed (the potato) will be the curse of Ireland. The people must go back to the food they were accustomed to live upon before the general cultivation of the dirty weed—to grow wheat, oats, and rye. You have four millions of males in Ireland, and eight millions of uncultivated acres. This ground must be drained and brought into cultivation, and grow grain crops. *The potato will not last twenty years more. It will work itself out, and then you will see to what a state Ireland will be reduced.* You must return to grain crops, and then Ireland, instead of being the most degraded, will be one of the finest countries in the world. You may live to see my words prove true, but I never shall."—See DOUBLEDAY'S *Life of Peel*, vol. ii. p. 398, note. This prediction of Mr Cobbett is very remarkable—almost as much so as his memorable saying in America in 1819, that when he heard the Monetary Bill of that year was passed in England, he immediately gave orders to pack up his things and return to London, foreseeing that parliamentary reform could not be much longer delayed.

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¹ Personal
knowledge;
Mart. ii.
673; Ann.
Reg. 1845,
2, 3.

39.
Increased
efforts of
the Anti-
Corn-Law
League.

to open, and incessant deluges overspread the already saturated earth. These were accompanied by violent thunderstorms, in the course of which the electric fluid descended in sheets of flame into "the green and deluged earth." This wet and stormy weather continued, with very little intermission, through the whole of autumn; prices rapidly rose, and serious fears began to be felt for the grain crops. But these were soon thrown into the shade by the reports which were ere long spread of a mysterious disease among the potatoes, which threatened absolute destruction to that widespread and important part of the subsistence of the people. The plague thus introduced was, literally speaking, "the pestilence which walketh in darkness." It was so minute that *it eluded the powers of the finest microscope*—so mysterious that it defied the researches of the most searching philosophy; but it was strong enough to overturn governments, general enough to alter established commerce, powerful enough to cause the migration of nations.¹

Charmed with the advent of so powerful and unexpected an ally, the Anti-Corn-Law League made the utmost efforts to turn it to the best account. Their language and their tactics underwent an immediate change. It was no longer, as it had been for the last two years, to the sufferings of the farmers, arising from low prices, which they promised to elevate by repealing the Corn Laws, that they addressed themselves; the loud cry was now raised that their instant abrogation was indispensable to prevent the people dying of famine. For some time past their funds had been mainly directed to increasing the number of Liberal electors on the rolls; and the Agricultural Protection Society, which had risen up to check its efforts, had boasted that the Anti-Corn-Law League had degenerated into a new registration club. Now, however, it resumed its pristine avocation of shaking and alarming the public mind, and this it did with

immense success. Fifteen thousand copies of the *League* newspaper were weekly distributed; two millions of other publications, tending to the same point, were circulated; three hundred thousand letters were sent out in the course of the year. Covent Garden theatre was fitted up in autumn as a great bazaar for goods, presented and exposed for sale in aid of the League fund. They brought £25,000, and 125,000 persons visited the magnificent establishment. The funds of the League seemed to increase with magical rapidity, as its necessities augmented and the period of its approaching triumph drew nigh. A meeting of the members was held in Manchester in December, at which a levy of £250,000 was agreed to, to further the objects of the League, and £62,000 was subscribed in the room. One gentleman subscribed £1500; twenty, £1000 each. This was in addition to £122,508 previously raised by subscription. It must be confessed that the leaders of this great association made most extraordinary efforts to promote its objects, and showed themselves consummate masters of the art of agitating and ruling mankind.¹

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1845.

Meanwhile prices of every kind of subsistence rose with extraordinary rapidity, and the real dangers of the period became such that there was no need of political agitation or imaginary terrors to exaggerate them. Wheat, which in June 1845 had been at 45s. 9d., rose so rapidly that in November it was at 60s.² Every other species of food advanced in a similar proportion, and these prices, to a people long inured to the low rates produced by the contracted currency, appeared to threaten famine. Every post from Ireland brought over fresh and more alarming reports of the failure of the potato crop, as well as the serious damage done to the general harvest by the heavy and long-continued rains. A transport similar to that which preceded the passing of the Reform Bill seized upon the public mind, and it became soon evident that the torrent was for the time

¹ Ann. Register, 1845, Chron. 67. 193; Mart. ii. 674, 675.

^{40.}
General alarm, and symptoms of change.

² Tooke on Prices, iv. 411, 412.

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irresistible, and that in the mean time at least, and during the continuance of the potato famine, all duties on foreign grain must be removed. On 10th October, Lord Ashley addressed a letter to the electors of Dorsetshire, in which he declared his conviction that "the destiny of the Corn Laws was fixed, and that the leading men of the great parties in the legislature were by no means opposed to their eventual abolition." In the beginning of November cabinet councils were very frequent, and it was known that Government had set on foot extensive inquiries concerning the failure of the crop, and about the same time Lord Morpeth joined the Anti-Corn-Law League. The accession of so leading a political character was justly considered as decisive of the views of the entire Whig party. It was no longer a question, save of time, when the change was to be made, and the two leaders of the opposite parties saw that nothing remained for them but to run a race who should first make the desired alteration.¹

¹ Spectator, 1845, 1132; Mart. ii. 675; Parl. Deb. lxxxiii. 86.

41.
Lord John Russell's Letter, Nov. 22.

An attentive observer of the signs of the times, Lord John Russell no sooner saw that the period was approaching when Government must take the initiative in the expected changes, than he resolved to forestall their leader, and bid for power by anticipating the Minister in them. On 22d November 1845, he addressed a letter to the electors of London on the subject, in which he said: "The present state of the country in regard to its supply of food cannot be viewed without apprehension. Forethought and bold precaution may avert serious evils: indecision and procrastination may produce a state of suffering which it is frightful to contemplate. Three weeks ago it was generally expected that Parliament would be called immediately together. The announcement that Ministers were prepared on its first meeting to propose a suspension of the import duties on corn, would have caused orders to be sent at once to various ports of Europe and America for the purchase and transmis-

sion of grain, for the consumption of the United Kingdom. An Order in Council dispensing with the law was neither necessary nor desirable. No party in Parliament would have made itself responsible for the obstruction of a measure so urgent and beneficial. The Queen's ministers have met and separated without affording us any promise of such seasonable relief. It becomes us, therefore, as the Queen's subjects, to consider how we can best avert, or at all events mitigate, calamities of no ordinary magnitude.

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1845.

"Two evils require your consideration—one of these is the disease in the potatoes, affecting very seriously parts of England and Scotland, and committing fearful ravages in Ireland. The extent of this evil has not yet been ascertained, and every week tends either to reveal unexpected disease, or to abate in some districts the alarms previously entertained. But there is one effect peculiar to failure in this particular crop. The effect of a bad corn harvest is, in the first place, to diminish the supply in the market, and raise the price. Hence diminished consumption and the privation of incipient scarcity, by which the whole stock is more equally distributed over the year, and the ultimate pressure is greatly mitigated. But the fear of the breaking out of this unknown disease among the potatoes, induces the holders to hurry into the market, and thus we have at one and the same time rapid consumption and impending deficiency, scarcity of the article and cheapness of price. The ultimate suffering must thereby be rendered far more severe than it would otherwise be. Another evil under which we are suffering is the fruit of Ministerial counsel and Parliamentary law. The duties on the importation of grain, passed three years ago, are so contrived, that, the worse the quality of the corn, the higher is the duty; so that when good wheat runs to 70s. a quarter, the average of all wheat is 57s. or 58s., and the duty 15s. or 14s. a quarter. Thus the corn barometer points to fair when the ship is bending under a storm.

42.
Continued.

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43.

Concluded.

"It is no longer worth while to contend for a fixed duty. In 1841 the Free-trade party would have agreed to a duty of 8s. a quarter on wheat, and after a lapse of years this duty might have been further reduced and ultimately abolished. But the imposition of any duty at present, without a provision for its extinction in a short period, would but prolong a contest already sufficiently fruitful of animosity and discontent. The struggle to make bread scarce and dear, when it is clear that part at least of the additional price goes to increase rent, is a struggle deeply injurious to an aristocracy which (this quarrel once removed) is strong in property, strong in the construction of our legislature, strong in opinion, strong in ancient associations and the memory of immortal services. Let us, then, unite to put an end to a system which has been proved to be the blight of commerce, the bane of agriculture, the source of bitter divisions among classes, the cause of penury, fever, mortality, and crime among the people."¹

¹Doubleday,
Life of Peel,
ii. 403, 404.

44.
Approach
to a repeal
of the Corn
Laws, and
resignation
of Sir R.
Peel.

Not less attentive than his rival to the circumstances of the country, Sir R. Peel having received the reports from Ireland, which were extremely alarming, brought before the Cabinet the question, What was to be done to avert the threatened calamity? His own idea was to throw the ports at once open by an Order in Council, trusting to Parliament for a bill of indemnity. But his colleagues were divided on the necessity of such an extreme measure, and after several cabinet councils had been held in the beginning of November, it was agreed to appoint a commission to inquire into and suggest measures to avert extreme distress in Ireland, and the Cabinet met on the 25th to consider the reports received. It was found, however, that the former division remained: a minority of the Cabinet, at the head of which was Lord Stanley, deemed the circumstances not yet such as to justify any permanent deviation from the protective policy of Government. Sir R. Peel thought otherwise: he was

so strongly impressed with the dangers of the approaching crisis that he deemed it indispensable to make, not only a temporary but a permanent change of policy. As the Cabinet was divided on this subject, however, and Lord John Russell, by his letter from Edinburgh, already quoted, had declared for total repeal of the import duties, and put himself at the head of the Free-trade party, he felt the impossibility at such a crisis of carrying on the government in the face of such a coalition, and he accordingly tendered his resignation and that of his colleagues to her Majesty, which was accepted.¹

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Dec. 6.
¹ Peel's
Mem. ii.
Lord J.
Russell's
Statement;
Parl. Deb.
lxxxiii. 97;
Ann. Reg.
1845, 2, 3.

The Queen immediately sent for Lord John Russell, and he received the royal command on the 8th December, and reached Osborne House, in the Isle of Wight, on the 11th. His answer to her Majesty, when requested to undertake the formation of a ministry, was, that as the party to which he belonged was in a minority in the House of Commons, it would be vain for him to attempt a task which would expose her Majesty, ere long, to the inconvenience arising from a second change of servants. He recommended the Queen, accordingly, to send for Lord Stanley, to endeavour to form a Protective ministry; but that nobleman, upon being applied to, declared his absolute inability to do so.* Upon this the Queen renewed her application to Lord John, and showed him a paper which Sir R. Peel had left with her when he resigned office, in which he declared his intention, "in his private capacity, to give every support to the new minister whom her Majesty might select to effect a settlement of the question of the Corn Laws." This entirely altered the case, as it assured the Whig Cabinet of the support of at least one, and that the most powerful, of the great

45.
Failure of
Lord John
Russell to
form a gov-
ernment,
and restora-
tion of Sir
R. Peel's
Cabinet.

* "I informed her Majesty, that, considering that Lord Stanley, and such of my colleagues as had differed from me, had positively declined to undertake the formation of a government, and that Lord John Russell having had the concurrence and support of all his political friends, with a single exception, had abandoned the attempt to form one, I should feel it my duty, if required by her Majesty, to resume office."—*Peel's Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 248.

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Dec. 19.

Dec. 20.

Tory party. Lord John accordingly returned to town, to consult his friends on the possibility of forming a Cabinet, and at first there was every prospect of success. But ere long a difficulty, which proved insurmountable, presented itself. Earl Grey, upon being applied to, refused to join the new Cabinet if Lord Palmerston formed part of it—so strongly was he impressed with the hazard attending the foreign policy to which the latter noble lord was attached. Lord Palmerston, however, from his ability, and vast diplomatic information and connections, was too powerful a man to be dispensed with. The result was, that this attempt to form a Cabinet failed, and Lord John informed her Majesty of this on the forenoon of the 20th. On the preceding day, the Queen had informed Sir Robert Peel, that, as their political relation was about to terminate, she wished to see him next day to bid him farewell. He went accordingly, in obedience to the royal command ; but, on entering her Majesty's presence, he was informed that Lord John Russell's mission had failed, and that nothing remained but for him to resume office. This he accordingly did, and the whole Cabinet resumed their places, with the exception of Lord Stanley, who retired. He was succeeded by Mr Gladstone as Colonial Secretary ; and the Duke of Buccleuch, who at this crisis joined the Free-trade party in the Cabinet, was made President of the Council in room of Lord Wharncliffe, who had died on the 19th. The Cabinet was now entirely composed of Free-traders ; and the influence of that party in the House of Commons, at the same time, was much increased by the unopposed return of Lord Morpeth to his old seat for the West Riding of Yorkshire, in room of Mr Stuart Wortley, who succeeded to the peerage on his father Lord Wharncliffe's death.¹

¹ Peel's
Mem. ii.
248, 254 ;
Lord J.
Russell and
Sir R. Peel's
Statements ;
Parl. Deb.
cxviii. 89,
3, 10 ;
Ann. Re-
gister, 1845,
Chron.,
320—1846,
205.

While these ministerial difficulties and arrangements, big with the future fate of the British empire and of commerce throughout the world, were in progress in the elevated political regions, the public mind was violently

shaken by an announcement, which suddenly appeared in the *Times* of December 4, to the effect that the repeal of the Corn Laws was resolved on in the Cabinet, and that Parliament would be called together in January to carry the resolution into effect. This statement was immediately contradicted, in the most unqualified manner, by the *Standard*, and other Tory newspapers; but the *Times* persisted in maintaining it, adding, that the repeal would be moved in the House of Commons by Sir R. Peel, and in the House of Lords by the Duke of Wellington. This excited a very great sensation, the more especially as it was known that the journal in question had very peculiar sources of information, and enjoyed the confidence, either directly or through the intervention of a third party, of more than one member of the Cabinet. Grain immediately fell, and the spirits of the League rose. They now everywhere announced that they were secure of victory, that they would accept of no compromise, and that "not a shilling nor a farthing should be imposed without sound reason shown." The sudden resignation, and still more sudden reconstruction of Sir R. Peel's Cabinet shortly after, left no doubt as to some great change in the Corn Laws being in contemplation; and it was soon whispered that the Cabinet was now unanimous, and that the "Iron Duke" himself had reluctantly given in. Before Parliament met, on 19th January, it was generally understood that the cause of Protection was lost, and the question was set at rest, so far as the Cabinet was concerned, by the paragraph in the Queen's Speech on the subject, delivered by her Majesty in person.¹

"I have to lament," said her Majesty, "that, in consequence of a failure of the potato crop in several parts of the United Kingdom, there will be a deficient supply of an article of food which forms the chief subsistence of great numbers of my people. The disease by which the plant has been affected has prevailed to the utmost extent in Ireland. I have adopted all such measures as were in

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46.

Announcement of the repeal of the Corn Laws in the *Times*.
Dec. 1.

¹ *Times*,
Dec. 4, 6,
and 7, 1845;
Mart. ii.
677; *Ann.*
Reg. 1846,
3, 5.

47.

Queen's
Speech.
Jan. 19.

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my power for the purpose of alleviating the sufferings which may be caused by this calamity, and I confidently rely on your co-operation in devising such other means for effecting the same benevolent purpose as may require the sanction of the legislature. I have had great satisfaction in giving my assent to the measures which you have presented to me from time to time, calculated to extend commerce, and to stimulate domestic skill and industry, by the repeal of prohibitory and the relaxation of protective duties. The prosperous state of the revenue, the increased demand for labour, and the general improvement which has taken place in the internal condition of the country, are strong testimonies in favour of the course which you have pursued. I recommend you to take into your earnest consideration, whether the principles on which you have acted may not be yet more extensively applied, and whether it may not be in your power, after a careful review of the existing duties upon many articles the produce or manufacture of other countries, to make such farther reductions and remissions as may tend to insure the continuance of the great benefits to which I have adverted, and, by enlarging our commercial intercourse, to strengthen the bonds of amity with foreign powers.”¹

¹ Ann. Reg.
1846, 5.

48.
Sir R. Peel's
argument in
favour of
Free Trade.

Such were the words by which Sir R. Peel, in her Majesty's name, announced to the world the greatest change ever made in the commercial policy of any nation, namely, the sudden transition from a Protective policy, the natural safeguard of a rising, to a Free-trade, the invariable demand of an advanced, stage of civilisation.

- His detailed plans were brought forward in a luminous speech of four hours' duration, the object of which was to represent the change in the Corn Laws, great as it was, as not an insulated measure, but part of a great system of policy by which all classes were to be ultimately benefited. The public excitement was extreme. Every crevice in the House was filled ; Prince Albert and the Duke of Cam-

bridge were among the auditors. "The great principle of the relaxation of protective duties," said he, "recommended in the speech from the Throne, I intend to apply not to any one particular interest, but to all interests. On the contrary, I ask all the great interests of the country, manufacturing, commercial, and agricultural, to make the sacrifice, if it be one, to the common good. Of late the whole tariff of import duties has been more than once submitted to the House. In 1842 I commenced, and in 1845 carried out, to a very large extent, a plan for the remission of duties on the raw materials constituting the elements of manufacture. There is at this moment scarcely a duty on the raw material imported from foreign countries which we have not abandoned. I have, therefore, a right to call on the manufacturer to relinquish the protection of which he is now in possession. The only two articles of rude produce still subject to duty are tallow and timber: on the first, I propose to reduce the duty from 3s. 2d. to 1s. 6d. a cwt., and on the second, to make also a very great reduction. In regard to manufactures, I call on those who are engaged in making up the three articles, wool, linen, and cotton, which form the clothing of the country, to show the sincerity of their convictions in favour of Free Trade, by relinquishing the protection of which they are in possession. I do this the more confidently, as it was the manufacturing, and not the agricultural interest, which first called on the Government for protecting duties.

"In pursuance of these principles, I propose to relinquish all duties upon the importation of the coarser species of manufacture in wool, linen, and cotton, and to reduce the duties on the finer linen and cotton goods from 20 to 10 per cent. The duty on silk, at present 30, is to be reduced to 15 per cent. On a great variety of articles which enter into general consumption—boots, shoes, hats, gloves, dressed hides, straw-plait, carriages, candles, soap, brandy, Geneva, sugar, and various other articles, the duty is to be materially reduced; and in return for this, I think

49.
Continued.

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I am entitled to call on the agriculturists to submit to some sacrifice for the general good. What I propose is this : The duty on all seeds to be entirely removed, as also on Indian corn or maize, buckwheat and buckwheat flour. The duty on foreign butter, cheese, hops, and cured fish, to be reduced to half its present amount. Every sort of animal and vegetable food, apart from corn, to be admitted duty free, including all animals from foreign countries. All kinds of grain, after 1st February 1849, to be admitted at a nominal duty of 1s. a quarter, kept on only in order to obtain statistical returns of the quantities imported. During the intermediate period to 1st February 1849, the duties to be so calculated as to keep wheat at an average price of 50s. a quarter, and the scale adopted would, at the present price, which was 55s., lower the duty at once from 16s. a quarter to 4s.*

50.
Continued.

“ To compensate, in a certain degree, the loss which these reductions will occasion to the farmers, I propose to make certain concessions, especially relating to turnpike roads, poor-rates, and the support of criminals. Turnpikes in England are now under the direction of 16,000 local authorities, distributed over different parts of the country. I propose to compel parishes to unite themselves into districts for the repair of the roads, in such a way as will reduce these 16,000 managers to 600—a change which will get quit of a great number of superfluous employes, save expense, and insure a better administration of the roads. The power of removability should be taken from every labouring man who had earned an industrial residence of five years in any manufacturing town, and from all children, legitimate or illegitimate, residing with the father or mother, where the parent

* THE SCALE ON WHEAT WAS AS FOLLOWS :—

Per Quarter.		Per Quarter.	
Under 48s. the duty to be	10s.	Under 51s. to 52s.,	6s.
„ 48s. to 49s.,	9s.	„ 52s. „ 53s.,	5s.
„ 49s. „ 50s.,	8s.	„ 53s. and upwards,	4s.
„ 50s. „ 51s.,	7s.		

itself was not removed ; from all widows till twelve months after the husband's death, and from all persons become chargeable on the ground of sickness, unless it shall be proved to the satisfaction of the magistrate that such sickness or disability is incurable. These changes will prevent a large part of the population which has migrated from the country into towns, during health, being thrown back on the country when they become chargeable. Facilities will be given for the improvement of entailed estates by advances of Exchequer bills, to be repaid with a moderate interest in a long course of years. Finally, the cost of maintaining felons in jail, which is now a burden on the counties, should be defrayed by the Treasury. This will be a relief to Ireland of £17,000; in England, of £100,000 a-year ; and the whole expense of the constabulary of Ireland, amounting to £539,000 a-year, is to be also laid on the public Exchequer. To compensate these advantages to Ireland, I propose to take on the Treasury half the medical expenses of the Poor Law Unions, which in England will be £100,000, in Scotland, £15,000, and to give £15,000 a-year for the education of the children in the workhouses.

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“ These are the proposals which I offer for the adjustment—the final adjustment, of this question. I cannot appeal to any ungenerous feeling. I cannot appeal to fear, nor to anything which will be calculated to exercise an undue sway over the reason of those to whom these proposals are made. There may be agitation ; but it is not one which has reached the labouring classes, there being among them a total absence of all excitement. I admit it is perfectly true, that without danger to the public peace we might continue all the existing duties ; therefore I cannot appeal to fear as a ground for agreeing to those proposals. But this I do say, that there has been a great change of opinion in the great mass of the community with respect to the Corn Laws. There is between the master manufacturer and the operative classes a com-

51.
Continued.

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mon conviction, that did not prevail in 1842, or at any former period, that those laws should be repealed ; and while there is that union of sentiment between them, there appears to be, at the same time, a general contentment and loyalty, and a confidence in the justice and impartiality of this house. The example you have set of taking upon yourselves great pecuniary burdens, in order that you might relieve the labouring classes from the taxation to which they were subjected, has produced the deepest impression and the most beneficial effect upon their minds. But because this is a time of peace ; because there is a perfect calm, except in so far as the agitation among the manufacturers may interrupt it ; because you are not subject to any coercion whatever, I entreat you to bear in mind that this aspect of affairs may change, that we may have to contend with worse harvests than those of this year, and that it may be wise to avail ourselves of the present moment in order to effect an adjustment, which I believe must ultimately be made, and which cannot be much longer delayed without engendering deep feelings of animosity between different classes of her Majesty's subjects.

^{52.}
Continued.

“ What were the facts which came under our cognisance, charged with the responsibility of providing for the public peace, and saving millions from the calamity of starvation ? We were assured that in one part of this empire there are 4,000,000 of the Queen's subjects dependent upon a certain article of food for subsistence. We know that on that article of food no reliance could be placed. It was difficult to say what was the extent of the danger, what would be the progress of the disease, and what the amount of deficiency in the supply of food. Surely you will make allowance for those who were charged with the heaviest responsibility, if their worst anticipations should be realised. We saw in the distance the gaunt form of famine, and the spectre of disease following in its train. Was it not our first duty to avert the odious charge of

indifference and neglect of timely precautions? I declare in the face of this house, that the day of my life to which I look back with the greatest satisfaction and pride, is the 1st November last, when I offered to take the responsibility of issuing an Order in Council to open the ports, and trust to you for approval and indemnity. I wished then, that, by the first packet which sailed after the 1st November, the news might have gone forth that "the ports were open." During the latter part of December, and in January, there has been a temporary suspension of alarm; but still the accounts we have from all parts of the country are sufficient to excite great uneasiness, and imperatively call for the present remedial measure. *

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"And now I come to the second consideration,—How, after the admission of foreign imported corn for a period of several months, do you propose to deal with the existing corn-law? My conviction is so strong that it would be utterly impossible, after establishing freedom of trade in corn for a period of seven or eight months or more, to give a guarantee that the existing law should at the end of that time again come into operation, that I cannot encourage the delusive hope of any such result. It is an utter misapprehension of the state of public opinion to suppose it possible, that after this country, during eight months, shall have tasted of freedom of trade in corn, you can either revive by special enactment, or by the tacit operation of the law itself, the existing corn-law. Surely the very fact of suppression is itself a condemnation of the law. It demonstrates that the law which professed, by a total reduction of duty when grain reached a certain price, to provide against scarcity, had failed in its most essential point. Could you, after this, insist upon a revival of this law? Would you revive the existing law in all its provisions? Do not suppose that those who advised suspension have overlooked the consequences upon the question of future protection. Do not disregard public feeling in a question of this kind. When the

53.
Continued.

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food of the people is concerned, public opinion can never be disregarded. Are you insensible to the real state of public opinion on the subject? Are you insensible to the altered opinion of many of your own party? Look to the change of opinion that has taken place, not among mere politicians—which you are apt to attribute to some selfish or corrupt motive—but look at the opinions now expressed, of the sincerity of which conclusive proof has been given, by some of the most honourable men that ever sat upon those benches. Their conduct affords proof that the minister who should suspend the law, and give a guarantee to revive it whenever the period of suspension shall have passed away, would have enormous insuperable difficulties to encounter.

54.
Continued.

“Your precautions, however wisely taken, may nevertheless fail. It seems to be incident to great prosperity that there shall be a reverse, that the time of depression shall follow the season of excitement and success. That time of depression may perhaps return, and its return may be coincident with scarcity, occasioned by unfavourable seasons. Gloomy winters like those of 1841 and 1842 may again set in. Are those winters effaced from your memories? *From mine they never can be effaced.* Surely you have not forgotten with what earnestness and sincerity you re-echoed the deep feelings of a gracious Queen, when at the opening and close of each session she expressed her warmest sympathy with the sufferings of her people, her warmest admiration of their heroic fortitude. These bad times may recur. The years of plenteousness may have ended, and the years of dearth may come, and again you may have to offer the unavailing expressions of sympathy, and the urgent exhortations to patient resignation—will it then be no satisfaction to you to reflect that, by your own act, you have been relieved from the grievous responsibility of regulating the supply of food? Will you not then cherish with delight the reflection, that in this present hour of com-

parative prosperity, yielding to no clamour, impelled by no fear, save that provident fear which is the mother of safety, you have anticipated the evil day, and long before its advent had trampled on every impediment to the free circulation of the Creator's bounty ? And when you are again addressing your fellow-subjects, and encouraging them to bear without repining the dispensations of Providence, may God grant that, by your decision this night, you may have laid in store for yourselves the consolation of reflecting that such calamities are, in truth, the dispensations of Providence, and that they have not been caused, have not been aggravated, by laws of man, restricting, in the hour of scarcity and deepest need, the supply of food !

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“ You have a right, I admit, to taunt me with inconsistency in my opinions on this subject ; but when you say that by my adoption of the principles of free trade I have acted in contradiction to those principles which I have always avowed during my whole life, I positively deny the charge. I foresaw the consequences which would result from the measures which I have felt it my duty to propose. We have not formed our opinion merely on local information. We were charged with the heavy responsibility of taking measures against a great calamity in Ireland ; before we brought our remedies forward, we had taken every measure to obtain correct information on the state of that country. Whatever may be the result of these discussions, I feel severely the loss of the confidence of those from most of whom I have hitherto experienced a generous support. So far from expecting them to adopt my opinions, I perfectly recognise the sincerity with which they adhere to their own. I honour their motives ; but I claim for myself the right to give that advice to my Sovereign which I conscientiously believe to be conducive to the general well-being. I wish to convince the people that the greatest object which this or any other Government can have is to elevate the social

55.
Concluded.

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condition of those with whom we are brought in to no direct relations by the exercise of the elective franchise. I wish to show them that our object has been to apportion taxation, so that we shall relieve industry and labour from any undue burden, and transfer it, so far as is consistent with the public good, to those who are better able to bear it. I look to the present peace of this country, to the absence of all disturbance, to the non-existence of any commitment for a seditious offence ; I look to the calm which exists in the public mind ; I look to the absence of all disaffection ; I look to the increased and growing public confidence, on account of the course you have taken in relieving trade from restrictions, and industry from unjust burdens ; and where there was disaffection I see contentment, where there was turbulence I see peace ; where there was disloyalty I see loyalty. I see a disposition to confide in you, and not to agitate questions that are at the foundation of your institutions. Taught by this experience, I feel I have only done my duty to my Sovereign and my country in submitting the measures I have now brought forward to the consideration of Parliament.”¹ •

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxxiii.256,
263, 262—
lxxxvi.705;
Ann. Reg.
1846, 33, 36.

56.
Reception
of the mea-
sure in the
country.

No words can describe adequately the sensation which this speech produced in the country. The immediate reduction of the duty on wheat from 16s. a quarter to 4s., and its entire abolition at the end of three years, were changes so prodigious that they outstripped the hopes of the most sanguine of the Free-traders, and excited a profound feeling of indignation among all the adherents of the agricultural interest. The impression upon the latter class was the stronger that the alarm consequent upon the potato rot, which had been very great in the preceding November, had sensibly declined in the following month, and accordingly wheat, which had been 60s. in the former period, had fallen in the beginning of January to 55s. a quarter. It had been discovered upon farther information, that the disease, though as bad as possible in some parts of the country, was as yet at least by no means

universal, and that the apprehensions entertained of a great deficiency of subsistence for the body of the people had been much exaggerated. But above all, it was asked, "Why legislate permanently for a temporary evil? Grant that the potato rot is as universal and serious as the strongest Free-traders allege, that may afford a good reason for throwing open the ports at once, by Order in Council, and keeping them open as long as the calamity lasts; but is it any reason for entirely altering the policy of the country, and permanently adopting free trade in lieu of the protection under the shelter of which it has hitherto risen to greatness?" The Free-traders, on the other hand, were in ecstasies, and regarding, with reason, the battle as already gained, would not condescend to notice the arguments of their adversaries, but contented themselves with simply vilifying and abusing them. These angry feelings on the one side, and exulting on the other, exhaled during the debate which ensued in the House of Commons, which lasted for TWELVE successive nights, and gave rise to more acrimonious expressions on both sides, but especially the Protectionist, than had ever been heard within the walls of Parliament.¹

"Sir," said Mr Disraeli, "the right honourable gentleman has supported a different policy for a number of years. Well do we remember, on this side of the house, perhaps not without a blush, the efforts we made to raise him to that bench where he now sits. Who does not remember 'the sacred cause of Protection'—the cause for which sovereigns were thwarted, parliaments dissolved, and a nation deceived—delightful, indeed, to have the right honourable gentleman entering into all the details of what passed when he called upon his Sovereign! Would his Sovereign have called on him if he had not in 1841 put himself at the head of the gentlemen of England? That well-known position he took—a position to be preferred to the confidence even of sovereigns and courts. I say it without a hope of a party triumph, for I believe I

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¹ Ann. Reg.
1846, 119,
128; Mart.
ii. 684;
Doubleday,
ii. 419, 431.

57.
Mr Disraeli's caustic
remarks.

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belong to a party that can triumph no more—for we have nothing left for us but the constituencies we have *not* betrayed. I do say my conception of a great statesman is that of one who represents a great idea, an idea that leads him to power, an idea with which he has identified himself, an idea which he is to develop—which he can and does impress upon the mind of the nation. That is my idea of a great statesman. I care not whether he be a manufacturer or a manufacturer's son—the position is still grand, I may say heroic. But a man who never originates an idea, a mere watcher of the atmosphere—a man who, as he says himself, takes his observations, and when he finds the wind veers towards a certain quarter, trims to suit it—such a person may be a powerful minister, but he can never be a great statesman.

58.
Concluded.

“There is a difficulty in finding a parallel in any part of history to the position of the right honourable gentleman. The only parallel I can find is an incident in the late war in the Levant, which was terminated by the policy of the noble Lord opposite (Palmerston.) I remember when that great struggle was taking place, when the existence of the Turkish empire was at stake, the late Sultan, a man of great energy and resources, was determined to fit out an immense fleet to maintain his empire. A vast armament was accordingly collected. It consisted of many of the finest ships that ever were built. The crews were picked men, the officers were the ablest that could be found, and both officers and men were rewarded before they fought. Never did an armament similarly appointed leave the Dardanelles since the days of Solyman the Magnificent. The Sultan personally witnessed the departure of the fleet, and all the muftis prayed for the success of the expedition, as all the muftis here prayed for the success of the late general election. Away went the fleet; but what was the Sultan's consternation when the Lord High Admiral steered at once into the enemy's port!

The Lord High Admiral was called a traitor, but he had the talent of vindicating himself. "True," he said, "I did place myself at the head of this valiant armada; true it is that my sovereign embraced me: true all the muftis prayed for my success; but I have an objection to war; I see no reason for prolonging the struggle, and the only reason I had for accepting the command of the fleet was that I might terminate the contest by betraying my master! And yet such was the plausibility and adroitness of this Lord High Admiral, that he is at this moment first Lord of the Admiralty under the new regime." (Sir C. Napier—"I thought he was dead.") "The gallant commodore says he is dead; dead he may be, but at any rate he was not shot for treason."¹

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¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxxiii. 259.

These violent speeches are too characteristic of the ulcerated state of feeling in the country, then exasperated beyond all precedent, to be omitted in general history; but they have no bearing upon the general question, which was, whether the proposed change was in itself necessary and expedient, not whether Sir R. Peel did right or wrong in proposing it. The general question, however, did not want able advocates on the Protectionist side. It was argued by Lord Stanley, Mr Disraeli, and Lord George Bentinck: "From the earliest times—so far back as the reign of Edward IV.—the legislature has recognised the principle of protecting native industry, as a reason for regulating the importation of corn; and it has continued to be the rule of our legislature, down to the present period, to give encouragement to the cultivators of its own soil, in order to secure the independence of this country as regards foreign nations for ever. This has not only been our own policy, but at the very moment when we are venturing upon the bold experiment of leaving the supply of the nation's food to chance, every other country in the world of any eminence is maintaining a protective policy. Sir R. Peel could not have failed

59.
Arguments
against the
bill.

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to foresee the shock to confidence in public men of all parties which such a change as he has introduced must inevitably produce ; but he has entirely overruled the emergency and position in which he was placed ; he has confounded the brawling torrent of agitation with the deep still current of public opinion.

60.
Continued.

“ The grounds assigned for the measure is the famine in Ireland, and the success of the changes on the tariff ; but these reasons are inconsistent with each other. If this bill relieved the famine in Ireland, it can only be by bringing down the price of corn to the means of the starving population of Ireland. You must distinguish between famine and great local scarcity. We were threatened with the latter, but not with the first, in the expected reduction of prices. When the question came before the Cabinet, I (Lord Stanley) yielded my own opinion, and consented to a *suspension*, but a *suspension only*, of the corn-law. This was all that the case required ; for the prices showed that there was no general want of food in the country ; and I could see no reason for altering a general system for a partial failure ; but I stood alone. It is a total mistake to say that the sliding-scale has produced great fluctuation of prices ; the fact is, that it has done more than any other legislative measure to prevent that fluctuation. Never were the changes of price so violent and frequent as before that scale was introduced ; they then varied from 50s. to 120s. a quarter ; whereas since that time the fluctuation has been from 39s. to 80s., and generally from 40s. to 56s. In articles of subsistence to which the sliding-scale has not been applied—as potatoes and cotton—the fluctuation of prices has still been enormous. The present corn-law has kept us independent of foreign nations, and preserved an unprecedented steadiness in the price of grain ; and no man can assert that these advantages have been purchased by the sacrifice of any interest. On the contrary, the constant complaint of the agricul-

turists during its continuance has been, that the prices of their produce, with the exception of very bad seasons, have been ruinously low.

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“ If the Corn Laws are repealed, the price of corn will fall greatly; we shall have an inundation of foreign wheat at 40s. a quarter. In what way is this reduction, supposing prices are forced down to that level, to benefit any class in this country? The *foreign* grower, indeed, will be immensely benefited; he will be furnished with profits which will ere long enable him to extend his production, and encroach yet more largely on the English fields; but in what state will the English agriculturist be, if, by the operation of that law, prices are permanently forced down to 40s. or 42s. a quarter? Will the manufacturer be benefited by the change? He can be so only by a reduction of wages, and if that takes place, where is the good that is to accrue to the working classes? Supposing wages to be reduced, and the cost of production of manufactures to be thereby lessened, and the market for them extended, so far from being a gainer, he will be a loser by the change; the British manufacturer will be a loser. Every acre *brought into* cultivation on the Vistula or the Danube will *throw an acre out of cultivation* on the Thames or the Severn; and what will he gain if he destroys the bread, and thereby ruins the market, of the cultivators who consume five pounds a-head of his produce, and “ calls into existence ” an equal number of those who consume fivepence a-head ?

61.
Continued.

“ It is altogether a delusion to say that Russia, Prussia, and the United States do not take our manufactures because we do not take their corn. They do not take our manufactures because they wish to establish such fabrics among themselves, and in the mean time desire to raise a revenue by means of import duties. These motives will still continue, although we admit their grain duty free. Rely upon it, that change will make no difference in their consumption of our manufactures. It is in our

62.
Continued.

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own colonies that we must look for the only durable and growing market for our fabrics, which will soon come to overtop all other markets put together; but this measure, so far from encouraging these distant offshoots of our empire, goes directly and obviously to injure them. It deprives them of all the advantages they have hitherto enjoyed as British subjects, by letting in all nations to compete with the produce of their industry. Destroy the principle of protection, and you destroy the whole basis on which our colonial system rests, which is, that the colonies are to be in a more favourable situation than foreign nations. You sever the strongest bond—that of mutual self-interest—which unites them to the mother country. It is an easy step for those who have been taught commercial independence to apply it also to political relationship.

63.

Continued.

“The principle of Free Trade can never be adopted in what has been emphatically called a Protection Parliament, without a loss of character to public men. The alleged change of circumstances during the last three years furnishes no reason for abandoning the settled *policy* of two centuries, far less for the Premier’s deserting the principle he has strenuously maintained during the last thirty years. The doctrine of free trade is an absolute delusion: prolific of evil, it can be productive of no good to any party. It is simply, under existing circumstances, a preference given to foreign over native industry; and is that the way to benefit a nation? Even the manufacturing classes, to whom such strong appeals are made, will not in the end benefit by it. If the price of provisions permanently falls, their wages will fall with them, and what the better will they be when wheat is at 45s. instead of 75s., if their wages are 15d. a-day instead of 2s.? Will our shopkeepers be benefited if ten or fifteen millions are cut off from the rent of land that is the income of their best purchasers; or our manufacturers, if our rural labourers, who now form so large a

part of the home market, are disabled from continuing their purchases of their produce, and the British merchants are sent to the serfs of Poland or the Ukraine to supply their place?

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“The Irish famine, of which so much is said, is a mere pretence, got up for party purposes. There is not even a scarcity in the land. Prices prove this: wheat is at 55s. a quarter; oats at 26s.: are these famine prices? Why, in 1841, wheat was at 80s., and yet no one said there was a famine. The fact is, that the crop, on the whole, is fully an average one. The Duke of Wellington has admitted that there is no scarcity of food in Ireland, and Lord Cloncurry has added, that there is enough of oats in it to feed the whole people. There is in many places great distress among the peasantry, but that is not because they cannot get food to buy, but cannot get money to buy it with. Is it a remedy for this woeful state of things to admit the competition of foreign hands to flood the already overstocked Irish labour-market? The potato disease was in some places very formidable, but it was so only in a few districts. In Roscommon it was unknown; in Tipperary and Queen’s County, very partial. The alarm spread by the Government Commissioners has been the main cause of the panic which has been diffused, and even of the losses which have been sustained; for they, by spreading evil reports, induced the people in many places to raise their potatoes before they were ripe, and thus caused them to rot. But suppose the immediate danger from the potato rot to be as great as the most devoted adherents of Government represent, is that any reason for altering the entire system and policy of the State on account of a *transitory* evil, how serious soever? If scarcity is apprehended, by all means repeal all import duties so long as it continues; but it was reserved for the Right Honourable Baronet to provide a remedy for a *dreaded* scarcity in 1846 by enacting the repeal of all import duties in 1849.”¹

61.
Concluded.

¹ Parl Deb.
lxxxvi, 721
—lxxxiv.
349; lxxxiii.
263. Ann.
Reg. 1846,
68, 81.

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65.
Result of
the debate.

As the interesting debate, of which the above is only a faint outline, continued in the House of Commons, the public interest went on continually increasing, until at length it reached an unbearable point of excitement. This arose, not from any doubt of the sincerity or wishes of Ministers, which had been unequivocally evinced both in the Royal Speech and in the course of the debate, but from uncertainty as to the issue with a parliament avowedly elected under Protection influences, and to withstand the first advances of Free Trade. Great therefore was the surprise of the nation, unbounded the triumph of the Anti-Corn-Law League, when the division took place at twenty minutes before three on the morning of the 27th February, and there appeared a majority of 97 for Ministers, in a very full house, the numbers being 337 to 240. The bill was finally carried on the third reading, on the morning of the 16th May, by a majority of 98. Hoping to conciliate the all-powerful Prime Minister, who had expressed himself as willing to make theirs an exceptional case, the whole West India interest voted with him in the majority on this occasion. They met their deserts and a just retribution at the hands of his successors within two months afterwards. The shipping interest did the same; one and all of them voted with Ministers. They did so, partly in the idea that a large increase of foreign importation would give great employment to the British commercial navy, and partly from the idea that the navigation laws were so essential to our national independence that there was not the slightest danger of their being touched. "*Ita dum singuli pugnant universi vincuntur.*"¹ Within three years they too were swept away. In the Lords the result was still more remarkable, for the second reading was carried by a majority of 47, and the bill passed finally on the 22d June. Considering that the great majority of the peers were dependent on landed estates, and that the effect of the bill in lowering prices was distinctly understood, this division must be considered as

¹ Tacitus.

very remarkable, for beyond all doubt the greater part of their lordships thought very differently from what they voted. It indicates how great was the pressure which the Anti-Corn-Law League had come to exercise upon the public mind, how powerful was the influence which the Government and the Duke of Wellington possessed in that assembly, and what good use the Whigs, since their accession to power, had made of their time in neutralising the hostile majority in the Upper House by a copious creation of Peers.¹

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1 Parl. Deb.
lxxxiv. 349;
lxxvi. 721;
lxxxvii.
1033. Ann.
Reg. 1846,
69, 98; Dis-
raeli's Life
of Bentinck,
321.

The arguments adduced on either side in the House of Peers, were substantially the same as those adduced in the Commons, and need not be again repeated. But there is one short and characteristic speech, which, as coming from so great a man, and eminently descriptive of a leading feature in his mind, deserves to be particularly noticed. The Duke of Wellington said: "I address you under the disadvantage of appearing as a Minister of the Crown to press this measure, in opposition to the views of many of those with whom I have long acted in public life, with whom I have lived in habits of close intimacy and friendship, and whose good opinion it has always afforded me the greatest satisfaction to obtain, and indeed which I have enjoyed in the highest degree. I have already explained to you the circumstances under which I became a party to this measure. In November last, after the Cabinet to which I belonged had resigned, I considered it my bounden duty to my Sovereign not to withhold my assistance from her Government, and I resumed my seat at her Majesty's council, and gave my assistance to my right honourable friend the First Lord of the Treasury, because I knew, at that time, that he would propose a measure of this description—nay, this very measure. It was this very measure which he proposed to the Cabinet early in that month. It is not necessary for me, my lords, to say more on that subject; and though some of your lordships may entertain a prejudice against me for

66.
Duke of
Wellington's speech
on the bill.

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¹ Ann. Reg.
1846, 92;
Parl. Deb.
lxxxvii.
968.

the course which I am pursuing, I can justify it before your lordships, by telling you that I was bound to take it, and that if the same circumstances occurred to-morrow I would take it again. I was bound to my Sovereign and to my country by considerations of gratitude, of which I need not say more than to allude to them on this occasion."¹

67.
Cause of
this incon-
sistency.

This frank and manly declaration, coming from the old soldier who had grown grey in the service of his sovereign and country, drew forth loud cheers from all parts of the house. It is highly characteristic of the ruling principle of the Duke's mind, which had appeared in exactly the same way in the crisis on Catholic Emancipation, and in that on Reform. On both of these occasions he accepted a seat in a Cabinet, and on this last the lead in forming a Cabinet, which was to bring in a measure in direct opposition to his previous and often-expressed opinions. It would be uncharitable to conclude from thence that the Duke had no settled opinions on political subjects, and embraced such merely as suited the circumstances of the moment. His whole life belies such a supposition; no man had more fixed and decided convictions. The truth rather was, that his habits of military obedience had rendered one principle in his breast paramount to all others, and that was duty to his sovereign and country in moments of danger. This duty he felt himself bound to discharge, even at the hazard of his own consistency. * If there is much to admire in this noble feeling, which certainly is that which should ever animate a *soldier's* breast, there is much to dread in it when it becomes the guide of a *statesman's* career. And this only affords another illustration of the truth of a remark, which all ages have made, that the duties of civil and military life are often opposite to each other, and cannot, under any circumstances, be blended without imminent danger to both. The first duty of the soldier is obedience—the first of the statesman, deliberation.²

² Double-day, ii. 431.

Amidst the multiplied and protracted debates which took place on this all-important subject, in this session of Parliament, the Budget was well-nigh forgotten ; yet it presented some features of interest and importance, which foreshadowed the perilous course on which the Premier had advanced in repealing or reducing so many of the indirect taxes. It came on upon the 29th May ; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reason congratulated the country on the flattering condition of the finances, which he ascribed to the effects of Free Trade, without any reference to the railway expenditure. Sir R. Peel had calculated the revenue for the year at £49,762,000 ; but the actual receipts were £51,200,000. The expenditure was £49,400,167, leaving an apparent surplus of £2,609,177. Of this, however, £750,000 was the payment from China, which could only be reckoned on for one year more. For the ensuing year he calculated on a revenue of £51,650,000 ; but, owing to an increase of £140,000 for the army, £600,000 for the navy, and £401,000 for the ordnance, which had become absolutely indispensable to restore these services to anything like a state of efficiency, the surplus would be only £776,000, of which no less than £700,000 would again be money from China.*¹ It afforded a melancholy proof of the chasm which the large reduction of the indirect duties had made in the revenue, that the only surplus in the ensuing year, which even the sanguine mind of the Chancellor of the

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68.

The Budget
for 1846.
May 29.

¹ Budget,
May 29,
1846; Ann.
Reg. 1846,
119, 120;
Parl. Deb.
lxxxvi,
1430, 1428.

* ACTUAL EXPENDITURE OF 1845. AND ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE OF 1846.

	1845. Actual Expenditure.	1846. Estimated Expenditure.
Interest of Debt,	£28,200,000	£28,100,000
Charges on Consolidated Fund,	2,400,000	2,500,000
Army,	6,715,000	6,697,000
Navy,	6,943,000	7,521,000
Ordnance,	2,142,000	2,543,000
Miscellaneous,	3,116,000	3,485,000
	£49,316,000	£50,873,000

-Ann. Reg.-1846, pp. 120, 121.

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Exchequer could foresee, was derived, after two years of unparalleled prosperity, from the accidental and transitory source of Chinese payments.

69.
Determina-
tion of the
Protec-
tionists
to drive Sir
R. Peel from
power.

It was foreseen, and scarcely disguised in the course of the debate on the repeal of the Corn Laws, from the extreme violence of the schism which had taken place in the Ministerial majority, and the words never to be forgiven which had passed between the Ministers and their opponents, that it was only a question of time when the Administration was to be overturned. Such was the exasperation of the Protectionist leaders on the Ministerial benches, that it was known they would gladly coalesce with their opponents on the opposite side of the house, to eject a Government which, as they thought, had betrayed the party that had placed it in power. Yet so utterly at variance were the views of the ultra-Tories and the Radicals on all other subjects but their common animosity to the Premier, that it was not likely they would soon find a subject on which they could unite without such a flagrant dereliction of principle as might discredit and compromise both in the eyes of the nation. Chance, however, was more favourable to them than parliamentary skill could have been. A bill was actually before Parliament, which, it was thought, presented, most opportunely, the much-wished-for opportunity of uniting. This was the LIFE-PRESERVATION BILL FOR IRELAND.¹

¹ Doub. ii.
433; Mart.
ii. 685, 686.

70.
Increased
agrarian
outrages in
Ireland.

Ever since the decline of O'Connell's influence, by whose powerful voice its troubled waters had so often been stayed, and the downfall of the temperance movement, the state of Ireland had become more disturbed; and in the latter months of 1845 and first of 1846, it had risen to such a pitch of outrage that some remedial measure had become indispensable. This was the natural consequence of the dreadful state of destitution of food, towards which the wretched peasantry were rapidly approaching. When ejectionment for non-payment of rent from his little possession was little short of a sentence of death by slow

process pronounced upon a man and his whole family, men placed in a position so dreadful, almost unavoidably acted upon the principle of self-preservation, and endeavoured, by violence and intimidation, to avoid such disaster. To endeavour to check such outrages was the first duty of Government ; to remove their cause was the second. Early in the session, accordingly, Sir R. Peel introduced a measure by Lord St Germain's into the House of Peers, and the facts stated in support of it were of so appalling a kind as caused the bill to pass the Lords with scarcely any opposition.* It empowered the Lord-Lieutenant to proclaim any county or barony in which murder or attempt to murder had been committed, as falling under

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Feb. 24.

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* CRIME AND OUTRAGES IN IRELAND.

	1844.	1845.
Homicides,	144	136
Firing at persons,	104	138
Serious assaults,	504	544
Assaults, common,	242	251
Robberies of arms,	159	551
Administering illegal oaths,	59	22
Threatening letters,	662	1944
Houses attacked,	254	483
Firing into houses,	77	138
<hr/>		
Agrarian outrages,	1495	3462
Offences, violent—total,	3102	5281

The great majority of these offences were committed upon the peasantry or factors, the persons and dwellings of the gentlemen having been comparatively untouched.—LORD ST GERMAINS' *Speech*, 24th Feb. 1846 ; *Ann. Reg.*, 1846, p. 124. And of the savage unrelenting cruelty with which they were attended, an instance is given in *Sir R. Peel's Memoirs* : " A man and his wife of the name of Juthill, residing between Drumonod and Molill, were, early on the morning of the 7th, visited by a party of six men armed with guns and bayonets ; and having beaten the husband till he was senseless, they stripped his wife and put her on her back over some fire which they raked out of the fire-place for the purpose. This was for an agrarian cause ; and so intimidated are the sufferers, that although it is supposed they know perfectly well the perpetrators of the outrage, they refrain from giving evidence."—*Sir Charles O'Donnell's Memoir*, June 15, 1846 ; *Peel's Memoirs*, ii. 303. With truth did the Duke of Wellington say, when endorsing this report, with many similar facts, to Sir R. Peel : " I am aware that the facts therein reported could not be prevented by the Assassination Bill ; but they tend to show the state of society in Ireland, which is in fact worse than it is in any of the wildest parts of Asia, Africa, or America."—DUKE OF WELLINGTON TO SIR R. PEELE, June 21, 1846 ; *Peel's Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 302.

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the restrictions of the Act. By this Act all persons within the proclaimed district were forbidden, under pain of the penalties of misdemeanour, to leave their houses between sunrise and sunset, and the Government was authorised to station an additional constabulary force at the expense of the disturbed district. The bill also authorised the Lord-Lieutenant to award a reasonable compensation to the family or representatives of a murdered person. It was stated that the vast majority of the outrages were directed against individuals on account of private vengeance or hopes of intimidation, and that they were mainly owing to the infernal system of secret societies. Sir R. Peel said, with truth, that these societies had gone such a length "that there are many parts of Ireland in which no man's life is safe, *except indeed the life of an assassin.*"* So evident was the necessity of the measure, that it met with no resistance, but, on the contrary, the most cordial support, from the Opposition in the House of Peers. Lord Lansdowne "could not think of offering any opposition to a measure so imperatively called for at the present moment. He hoped it would be followed up by measures of permanent amelioration;" while Lord Brougham thought "the case was so urgent that the bill should be passed with the least possible delay." It passed the Lords, accordingly, without a division, its duration being merely restricted to 1st October 1849, instead of five years, as originally proposed.¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
Lxxvii. 953,
957; Ann.
Reg. 1846,
124, 126.

71.
Coalition
of parties
against the
Govern-
ment.

The fate of the bill, however, was widely different in the Lower House, where the vehement strife produced by the forcing through of the corn-law repeal had produced an ulcerated feeling in the minds of the Protectionists, which predisposed them to go into any coalition, how adverse soever to their principles, which might afford them an opportunity of manifesting their spleen against the Government. It was no easy matter, however, either

* SIR R. PEEL to DUKE OF WELLINGTON, June 23, 1846; *Peel's Memoirs*, ii. 306.

for them or the Whigs, to form an alliance with any show even of decency to oppose the measure, for both were pledged as deep as men could be to support it. The Conservatives had been the first to introduce coercion bills into Ireland, and one of the most efficient of them had been brought in by Sir R. Peel when Secretary for Ireland, and carried through by the whole strength of the Tory party then in power. Lord Grey had followed this example in 1834, and introduced a coercion bill attended with the most surprising good effects, in which he obtained the cordial support of the Conservative opposition.¹ More lately, Lord Morpeth had, in 1835, introduced a modified coercion bill, which also, whenever it was put in force, had produced the effect of stopping the progress of agrarian outrage. Now, however, these two opposite parties, animated by a common hatred of the Ministry, resolved to form a coalition to throw out the bill, the one in punishment of what they regarded as past treachery, the other in the hope of future accession to power. When these were the motives which led to this coalition, it is of little consequence what arguments were adduced either in support of or against the bill, for on both sides the speakers for a long time carried to perfection the maxim of Talleyrand, that the principal object of language is to conceal the thought.

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¹ Ante, c.
xxxi. §§ 31,
44.

The bill was introduced into the Lower House by Sir James Graham on the 3d March, and, from the very first, experienced the most determined opposition. Leave was given to bring it in by a majority of 39, it being understood that no serious resistance was to be made till the second reading. The whole Catholic party, of course, denounced the bill from the first as uncalled for and tyrannical in the highest degree; and the debate was carried on with such acrimony, that, after repeated adjournments, it was only brought to a first reading on 1st May ^{May 1.} when it was carried by 149, the numbers being 274 to 125. The second reading stood for the 25th May, but, from the

72.
Progress of
the bill.
March 3.

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May 25.

pressure of the corn-law debate, it was successively adjourned till the 9th of June, when it came on, and after repeated debates, was brought to a close on the 25th. During the course of the protracted debate, it became very evident that a coalition of parties to eject the Ministry had taken place, and as the end approached the real feelings of the opposite sides oozed out, notwithstanding every effort to conceal them, and the discussion was far more on the repeal of the Corn Laws than on the Irish Coercion Bill. A brief summary of the arguments formally adduced, however, is necessary, in order to show on which side the preponderance really lay, on this, as it had now become, momentous question.¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxxvii.
959, 1018;
Ann. Reg.
1846, 134,
137.

73.
Argument
in support
of the bill.

On the one hand, it was argued by Sir R. Peel, Sir James Graham, and the Solicitor-General: "The measure now proposed is undoubtedly a harsh one, and Government makes no attempt to vindicate it, except on the grounds of absolute necessity, but that necessity is unhappily too apparent. 1st, The extent, frequency, and nature of the crimes committed, indicates a necessity for a change of the law as it stands. 2d, The whole powers of the existing law have been tried and exhausted without affording any remedy to the evils. 3d, There is every reason to hope that the present bill will prove effectual in repressing the disorders existing, and which, in some places, have attained such a deplorable height. These disorders are not universal; they are confined to particular districts; but in them they have become such as to have entirely paralysed the arm of the law as it stands, and established, practically speaking, an entire impunity for crimes of the most atrocious description. It is not merely the number of offences, but the paucity of convictions, which is the alarming circumstance; but this disproportion has now risen to such a height in the disturbed counties as absolutely to call for the interposition of the legislature.

"The agrarian outrages are chiefly met with in five

counties, viz.—Tipperary, Clara, Roscommon, Limerick, and Leitrim. The population of those five counties, according to the last census, was 1,412,000 souls, while that of all Ireland is 8,175,124. Nevertheless, while the homicides in the whole country in 1845 were 92, in those five counties they were 47. The nightly firing into houses in those counties were seven-tenths of those in the whole country—proportions far beyond what the respective numbers of the inhabitants could warrant. Thus, when crime has so much increased in those counties, has the vigour of the criminal law and the conviction of offenders kept pace with the increase in crime? Quite the reverse: the ratio of convictions has come to be in the inverse ratio of the crimes. In these five counties, in 1845, the number of indictable offences was 1188, while the convictions were only 54! In Roscommon, within the last five months, no less than 383 indictable offences had been committed, and 8 convictions only obtained! If a special commission were now sent down to that county, what would be the result? Why, that nineteen-twentieths of the prisoners would walk away from the bar—a triumph to the malefactors—a reproach to the innocent sufferers under their crimes! Not less than 1100 or 1200 families in that county alone are living in daily dread of assassination; they know their enemies; they are aware from where they may expect outrages, but they dare not give information for fear of precipitating their fate. It may be safely affirmed that there is no other country in the civilised world where such a state of things would be suffered to exist.

“In former times similar local outrages have risen to great height in various places; but they were uniformly and effectually repressed by coercion bills similar to the present. Every one knows the immediate and signal success with which Earl Grey’s coercion bill in 1833 was attended, which in four months reduced the number of serious agrarian offences to one-fourth of their former amount; and the

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74.

Continued.

75.

Continued.

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same may be said of the next coercion bill, which was found to be indispensable after the expiry of the first, and was brought in by Lord Morpeth. In 1835 all crimes of an insurrectionary character had ceased, but those of an agrarian kind had multiplied to such a degree, that in that year they amounted to the enormous number of 10,229. No sooner, however, was Lord Morpeth's coercion bill passed than the number began to decline, and when that Act expired in 1840 they were only 4069. With the expiry of the Act, however, they again increased, until in 1845 they had reached 8095.* It is impossible to resist the conclusion from these facts, that, however adverse to British ideas of mild administration, such rude methods of coercion are indispensable in the lawless and savage state which unhappily prevails in some parts of Ireland. And accordingly, though universal in its power, the bill is intended to be only partial in its operation, and to be enforced only in those counties where the extreme prevalence of crime calls upon the Lord-Lieutenant to proclaim the Act. And experience warrants the hope, that the knowledge that the Executive is armed with these extraordinary powers, will have the effect of itself arresting the disorders, without the necessity of actually putting them in execution.¹

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxxvii.
1015; Ann.
Reg. 1846,
142.

76.
Concluded.

"If present appearances are looked to, the prospect is still more alarming, and ample proof of its necessity has been furnished since the Act was introduced into the Upper House five months ago. The gentlemen opposite always refer to the *total* commitments for crime over all Ireland, and because from the general prosperity which

* AGRARIAN CRIMES IN IRELAND.

Coercion Act passed.			Coercion Bill not renewed.		
1835,	.	10,229	1841,	.	5,370
1836,	.	8,067	1842,	.	6,535
1837,	.	6,760	1843,	.	5,870
1838,	.	4,945	1844,	.	6,327
1839,	.	4,626	1845,	.	8,095
1840,	.	4,069			
Act expired.			— <i>Parl. Deb.</i> , lxxxvii. 1015,		

prevails, and the vast extension of the demand for labour which the construction of railways in Great Britain has afforded, there has been on the whole no increase, perhaps rather a decrease, of crime, they immediately arrive at the conclusion that the measure now proposed is unnecessary. But that is a most erroneous view of the case. The disease is local ; at present it is confined to five counties ; but there are no causes in operation there which do not exist in the rest of Ireland, and the malady is so fearful where it has appeared, that there is no saying how soon, if unchecked, it may spread over the whole country. In the first five months of this year (1846) as compared with the corresponding months of 1845, there is a great increase in those five counties ; and the total of serious outrages in those five counties in the first five months of 1846 is no less than 2098.* If the same proportion should go on during the whole year, there will be a total of agrarian outrages in this year of 3013 against 2026 last year. The evil, therefore, though local, is fearful and rapidly increasing, and it behoves Parliament instantly to step in and apply that remedy which in former times has been found to be so efficacious.”¹

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¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxxvii.
426; Speech
of Sir R.
Peel.

On the other hand it was answered by Lord John

* GRAVE AGRARIAN OFFENCES IN TIPPERARY, CLARE, ROSCOMMON,
LIMERICK, AND LEITRIM.

	First Five Months of 1845.	First Five Months of 1846.
Homicides,	20	28
Firing at person,	40	41
Serious assaults,	85	121
Assaults to danger of life,	41	53
Firing into houses,	46	68

INSURRECTIONARY OFFENCES IN SAME COUNTIES.

	Whole of 1845.	First Five Months of 1846.
In Tipperary,	814	368
„ Limerick,	282	248
„ Clare,	271	189
„ Roscommon,	659	471
„ Leitrim,	804	164

In whole year, 2830 In five months, 1440
Parl. Deb. lxxxvii. 423, 427.

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77.

Answer of
the Coalition
against
the bill.

Russell, Mr Disraeli, Lord George Bentinck, and Mr O'Connell, who, strange to say, stood side by side on this occasion : " Without disputing the existence of crime and outrage in some parts of Ireland, the real question before the House is, whether this bill is calculated to afford a remedy for them. If it was so, it would be entitled to the hearty support of the house. But if the real state of Ireland is looked to, it will be seen that a coercion act is indeed required for Ireland ; but it is not one to restrain the peasantry from committing crime, but one to compel the landlords to do their duty. Government have the power in their hands, and if they would only take a manly tone, and adopt a temperate and dignified estimate of human nature with respect to Ireland, they might wave the wand that would turn her misery and poverty into prosperity and happiness. The disorders which are put forward as the justification of this coercive measure originate in the nature of the land tenure, and the anomalous relation between the landlord and tenant. There is in Ireland what is called the "starving season," which is about six weeks before the new harvest, and if during that period the growing crops are distrained, the labourers are deprived of their means of subsistence. They are prevented from digging ; if their wives or children come out in the evening to take a few potatoes they are driven to jail, the husbands are driven to madness. Can it be wondered at that such a state of things is a fruitful source of crime,—of crime, too, which did not exist in Ireland before the Union, but which is distinctly traceable to the exorbitant and unjust privileges conferred on Irish landlords by the English parliament ? These causes of evil this coercion bill will not remove. Similar bills have been tried in Ireland, *seventeen times*, and they have always failed and left the country worse than it was before.

" The real remedies for Ireland are to be found, not in a coercion bill, but in the removal of the causes which have

produced the disorders. These measures consist in an adjustment of the tenure of land, so as to secure the tenant an equitable compensation for his improvements, a modification of the whole ejectment bill to check the wholesale clearance system, the extension to all Ireland of the local Tenant-Right in Ulster, a modification of the Grand Jury Law, an increased Reform in Parliament, adequate Corporation Reform, and a better distribution of Church property. Uniformly it has been found that the number of murders in Ireland is in proportion to the number of ejectments ; and when it is recollected that 7,000,000 out of the 8,200,000 persons in Ireland live by agriculture, it may well be conceived what unbounded misery these wholesale ejectments occasion. It appears from the report of the Land Commission that from 1839 to 1843 no less than 150,000 persons had been subjected to the ejectment process. Imagination cannot figure the suffering which these ejections have occasioned. The serious crimes all originate in them ; political feeling has nothing to do with them. They will never be eradicated, or even permanently checked, till the causes which have produced them are removed.

“ The House of Commons has done too much for the Irish landlords, and too little for the tenants. The old English statutes in favour of landlords had not been re-enacted in Ireland under its old legislature ; but by the 56 Geo. III., c. 88, passed after the Union, these powers were at once transferred to them. This statute, for the first time, gave them the power of distraining growing crops, keeping them till ripe, and selling them when ready for the sickle, charging upon the unhappy tenant all the intermediate expenses. There never was a more fertile source of murder and outrage than those powers. This was followed by the 58 Geo. III., c. 39, conferring upon the landlord the power of ejecting the tenant, thus ruined, from his holding, the sole means of subsistence he had upon earth. The 1 Geo. IV., c. 41, still farther extended

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78.

Continued.

79.

Continued.

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the powers of civil bill ejectments; and the 1 Geo. IV., c. 88, enabled them, in ejectments, to compel the tenant to find security for expense. Finally, the 1 & 2 William IV., c. 31, gave the landlord the right of immediate execution in ejectments, which still farther facilitated these ejectments. All enactments are in favour of the landlords; and it is in them, joined to the refusal to recognise the tenant's right to compensation for improvements, that the real sources of the outrages so much complained of in the south of Ireland are to be found. Accordingly, in Ulster, where this right is partially recognised, these outrages are, comparatively speaking, unknown. Remove these causes of evil, and violent crime will speedily die out of itself; continue them, and twenty coercion bills will never eradicate it.*

80.
Concluded.

"The statistics so much relied on, on the other side, in reality prove nothing bearing on the present question. They demonstrate, indeed, in five counties an increase of predial outrages; but they by no means establish the necessity for any general measure of coercion, such as is now brought forward. On the contrary, so far as they prove anything they do directly the reverse. From May to July 1845 the amount of predial crime over all Ireland was considerably greater than from September to December.† In the first five months of 1845, the violent crimes amounted to 786; in the first five months of the present year they were only 554. The very crimes which this bill was intended to arrest have exhibited a falling off: in the first five months of last year they were 1701; in the corresponding five of this year they were 1356, exhibiting a diminution of 25 per cent in less than

* The two last paragraphs are from Mr O'Connell's able and instructive argument.—*Parl. Deb.* lxxxv. 524, 526.

† PREDIAL OFFENCES IN IRELAND.

1845.				1846.			
May,	.	.	.	823	November,	.	667
June,	.	.	.	896	December,	.	603
July,	.	.	.	708			

the first half of this year. Is this a state of things which warrants a measure of surpassing severity to last for a course of years? When the Ministers introduced it in the House of Lords, in February last, they described it as a temporary measure to meet a temporary emergency; and now, after the expiration of five months, they still press it forward after the emergency has passed away.”^{1*}

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¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxxiv.
178, 179.—
lxxxv. 524,
527.

During the progress of this important debate, which dragged its weary length along by repeated adjournments in the House of Commons, Ministers had frequent consultations as to the course which they should pursue in the event of the bill being rejected, which every day appeared to be more probable. The coalition between the Whigs, Radicals, and extreme Protectionists, to throw out the bill, and overturn the Ministry, had become evident, and it was more than doubtful whether all the influence of Government, and the popularity of its chief, would be able to withstand it. The Free-traders, with Mr Cobden at their head, voted *against him*, in return for his adoption of their principles; that gentleman, at the same time, “tendering him his heartfelt thanks for the unwearied perseverance, the unswerving firmness, and the great ability with which he had, during the last six months, conducted through the House of Commons one of the most magnificent reforms ever carried through in any country.” Lord George Bentinck and the Marquess of Granby, the representatives of the ducal houses of Portland and Rutland, led the band of Protectionists, eighty in number, who voted against the Ministry; Lord Chandos headed a body of one hundred who voted with them. Intense interest was felt in the house and the galleries, as the division took place, and the opponents of the measure fled off, for the Conservative party was entirely broken up, and no one could predict, with anything like certainty, how the division would turn out.

^{81.}
The bill is
thrown out
by a major-
ity of 73.

* The last paragraph is from Lord George Bentinck's speech.—*Parl. Deb.* lxxxiv. 178, 179.

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¹ *Parl. Deb.*
lxxxvii.
1021, 1027;
Peel's Mem.
ii. 298, 302.

The result, however, was more decisive than the most sanguine of the coalition could have anticipated, for there appeared 219 for Ministers, and 292 against them, leaving them in a minority of SEVENTY-THREE. By a singular coincidence, two hours before this decisive vote took place in the House of Commons, the Lords had passed the Corn-Law Repeal Bill; so that Sir R. Peel's greatest triumph and his fall occurred on the same night, and within a few hours of each other.¹*

² 82.
Mr Disraeli's account
of the scene.

Great and unexpected as this majority was, it was rendered still more decisive and galling to Sir R. Peel by the character of the men of whom it was composed. The scene has been thus recounted by the hand of a master, himself one of the principal actors in the mighty drama which was now performed. "It was not their numbers merely," says Mr Disraeli, "that attracted the anxious observation of the Treasury Bench, as the Protectionists passed in defile before the Minister to the hostile lobby. It was impossible that he could have marked them without emotion; the flower of that great party, which had been so proud to follow one who had been so proud to lead them. They were men to gain whose hearts, and the hearts of their fathers, had been the aim and exultation of his life. They had extended to him an unlimited confidence, and an admiration without stint. They had stood by him in the darkest hour, and had borne him from the depths of political despair to the proudest of living positions. Right or wrong, they were men of honour, breeding, and refinement,

* "Two hours after the intelligence arrived that the Lords had passed the Corn and Customs Bills, we were ejected from power; and by another coincidence as marvellous, on the day on which I had to announce, in the House of Commons, the dissolution of the Government, the news arrived that we had settled the Oregon question, and that our proposals had been accepted by the United States without the alteration of a word. . . . Lady Peel and I are here quite alone, in the loveliest weather, feasting on solitude and repose; and I have every disposition to forgive my enemies for having conferred upon me the blessing of the loss of power."—Sir R. PEELE to LORD HARDINGE, Drayton Manor, July 4, 1846; *Peel's Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 310.

high and generous character, great weight and station in the country, which they had for ever placed at his disposal. They had not only been his followers, but his friends ; had joined in the same pastimes, drank from the same cup, and in the pleasantness of private life had often forgotten together the cares and strife of politics. He must have felt something of this while the Mannerses, the Somersets, the Bentincks, the Lowthers, and the Lennoxes passed before him. And these were the 'gentlemen of England,' of whom, but five years ago, the very same building was ringing with his pride of being the leader."¹

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¹ Disraeli's
Life of Lord
George
Bentinck,
299.

Two courses, and two only, were open to Sir R. Peel after this defeat. The first was, to dissolve Parliament, and try the fortune of a new election ; the second, to resign office. The first course promised no advantages ; on the contrary, a certain accumulation of evils. It was impossible to expect that a Conservative majority could be obtained equal to that which brought him into power in 1841 ; on the contrary, it was certain it would be very much diminished. A great many of the English county constituencies would turn against one who they thought had betrayed them ; all the Irish, which returned Liberal members, would unite against a Minister who threatened them with a coercion bill. Lavish in their praises of him for having adopted their principles, the Free-traders would be the first to vote against him if he retained office ; the Whigs had cordially coalesced with the Protectionists to throw him out, and bring themselves in. Influenced by these considerations, Sir R. Peel, with the entire concurrence of the Duke of Wellington, wisely resolved to retire ; and on the 29th June, these two illustrious men announced, in the Lords and Commons respectively, that they held office only till their successors were appointed. It was the LAST TIME either addressed the house as the leaders of the Government.^{2*}

83.
Sir R. Peel
resolves to
resign.

² Ann. Reg.
1846, 152 ;
Sir R. Peel's
Cabinet
Memorandum,
June
21, 1846 ;
Mem. ii.
288, 292.

* " In my opinion, the loss of the Irish bill, by whatever means, recommended as that bill was by the Speech from the Throne, declared to be abso-

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84.

Sir R. Peel's
concluding
address.

"In proposing the measures of commercial policy," said Sir R. Peel, "which have disintituled them to the confidence of those who have hitherto given them their support, Government had no other desire but to promote the good of the country. Our object was to avert dangers which we thought were imminent, and to avoid a conflict which we believed would place in hostile collision great and powerful classes in this country. The love of power was not their motive; for I was well aware that, whether accompanied by failure or success, one event must necessarily occur, and that was, the termination of the existence of the Government. I admit that the withdrawal of the confidence of many of our friends was the natural consequence of the measures we proposed; and I do think, when measures of that kind are proposed, at variance with the course heretofore proposed by Ministers, the natural consequence is an expulsion from office. I therefore do not complain of it; anything is preferable to attempting to maintain ourselves in office without the confidence of this house. There has been a combination which, together with the influence of Government, has carried through these measures. But there is a name which ought to be associated with their success; but it is neither the name of the noble lord opposite (Lord J. Russell), nor is it mine. Sir, the name which ought to

lutely necessary by the Queen's Ministers, sanctioned almost with unanimity by the House of Lords,—the loss of the Irish bill will make the administration of Government in Ireland impossible, because discreditable, by the present executive. There is an Irish party, a determined and not insignificant one, in whom British indignation has no terrors. Their wish is to disgust England with Irish objects and Irish members, and to induce England, through sheer disgust, and the sense of public inconvenience, from the obstructions offered to all other business in Parliament, to listen to the repeal of the legislative union, for the purpose of purging the House of a set of troublesome and factious members, who equally obstruct legislation for Ireland and Great Britain. In presence of such a party, the loss of the bill will be a signal triumph over the Executive, not merely of the Repealers, but of the disturbers of the public peace, and promoters of assassination throughout Ireland. I think, therefore, we ought not to submit to the rejection or the defeat by other means than rejection of the Irish bill."—Sir R. PEEL'S *Cabinet Memorandum*, June 21, 1846.—*Memoirs*, vol. ii. pp. 291, 292.

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be, and which will be, associated with the success of those measures, is the name of a man who, acting, I believe, from pure and disinterested motives, has advocated their cause with untiring energy, and by appeals to reason, enforced by an eloquence the more to be admired that it was unaffected and unadorned—the name that ought to be, and will be associated with them, is that of Richard Cobden.

“ I shall now close the address which it has been my duty to make, thanking the house sincerely for the favour with which they have listened to this my last address in my official capacity. Within a few hours the power I have held for five years will have passed into the hands of another. I say it without repining, and with a more lively recollection of the support I have received than the opposition I have encountered. I shall, I fear, leave office with a name severely censured by many honourable men, who, on public principle, deeply lament the severance of party ties, not from any selfish or interested motive, but because they believe fidelity to party, and the existence of great parties, to be powerful instruments of good government. I shall surrender power, severely censured by many honourable men, who, from no interested motives, have adhered to the principles of Protection, because they looked upon them as important to the welfare and interests of the country. I shall leave a name execrated by every monopolist, who, professing honourable opinions, would maintain protection for his own individual benefit. But it may be that I shall be sometimes remembered with goodwill in those places which are the abodes of men whose lot it is to labour and earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow ; in such places, perhaps, my name may be remembered with expressions of goodwill, when those who inhabit them recruit their exhausted strength with abundant and untaxed food, the sweeter because no longer leavened with a sense of injustice.”¹

85.
Concluded.

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxxvii.
1054, 1056;
Ann. Reg.
1846, 157,
159.

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86.

Reflections
on his free-
trade mea-
sures.

These were manly words and noble sentiments, bearing the signet-mark of earnestness and sincerity, and worthy of a great minister taking for the last time the leave of the government of a great people. Yet must the truth of history take something from the brilliancy of the picture, and present the measures which he introduced, and which occasioned his fall, not in the impassioned words of earnest oratory, but in the sober guise of experienced truth. Such a survey will take nothing from the estimate which justice must ever form of the sincerity of the motives and the disinterestedness of the feelings by which the course was actuated, but add much to the difficulties with which its expedience is surrounded.

87.

Was a re-
turn to the
Corn Laws,
after the
famine was
over, prac-
ticable?

From what has been said, it is evident that the question, whether the permanent repeal of the Corn Laws, when carried through by Sir R. Peel in 1846, was or was not justifiable *on the reasons which he assigned*, depends entirely on the point, whether or not it was possible, after a temporary suspension of those laws, to have reverted to them when the danger had blown over. There may be difference of opinion on the question whether the potato rot in 1845-6 was so formidable in Ireland as to have rendered necessary the temporary suspension of the import duties; but there can be none whatever, that in the succeeding year the evil had extended to such a degree, and acquired such dimensions, as rendered an entire suspension of all import duties, at least for the time, indispensable. The real question, therefore, is, whether this temporary suspension rendered a lasting repeal unavoidable? Sir R. Peel maintains it did, because, he says, the nation having once tasted of the blessings of free trade in grain, would never go back to Protection; though he admitted there was no cry for repeal then among the working classes, and an entire want of excitement on the subject among them. There does not appear to be any ground for this opinion. The

sliding-scale had repeatedly, during the last fifteen years, reduced the import duties to 1s., especially in 1841, when wheat was at 80s. ; but no difficulty whatever had been experienced in enforcing the enhanced duties when prices fell. In former times, temporary suspensions of the Corn Laws, to meet temporary scarcities, had repeatedly taken place, and on their termination no difficulty had been felt in reverting to the protective duties.* This reason, therefore, put forward by the Premier for making the change permanent, in consequence of a passing calamity, was obviously ill founded. Whether or not the alteration had become unavoidable from a different cause—viz. the growing preponderance in the legislature, as framed by the Reform Bill, of the commercial interests over the agricultural—is a very different question, open to much more variety of opinion, but which, however strongly felt in secret, was not in public put forward as a justification of the lasting change.

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In truth, long before the Corn-Law Repeal Bill had passed into a law, not only was the necessity of any change after the lapse of years, so far as it arose from any real or supposed scarcity, passed away, but the terrors even of immediate want were found to have been extremely exaggerated. So early as 13th January, before the bill was introduced into Parliament, the Duke of Wellington had called Sir R. Peel's attention to the important fact, that the price of potatoes in Ireland at that period *was only 6d. a cwt. dearer than the average*

88.
The danger
of scarcity
had passed
away before
the bill was
brought for-
ward.

* "In December 1756 Parliament met, and passed an Act discontinuing, for a limited period, the importation duties. In 1767 wheat was at 57s. 4d., and the first act of the session was one allowing the importation of wheat and wheat-flour, oats and oatmeal, rye and rye-meal, into this kingdom, for a limited period, free of duty. At those periods importation was prohibited when wheat was below 57s. 4d., and from that to 80s. it was admissible at a duty of 8s. In 1791 a change in the import duties took place, and in 1793 an Act passed permitting the importation of wheat and flour at the low duties. In 1795 an Act was passed permitting, for a limited time, the importation of corn free of duty; and the same was done in 1799, the price being then 69s."—Sir R. PEEL'S *Cabinet Memorandum*, Nov. 29, 1846; *Memoirs*, ii. 189, 190.

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of the eight preceding years—a state of things inconsistent, not merely with famine, but even serious scarcity.*

Dr Lyon Playfair, and the Commissioners sent over to inquire into the subject in November preceding, had reported that half the crop had perished; but though this was the case in some districts, it was far from being so generally. Wheat fell in January from 60s., which it had reached at the height of the panic, to 55s.; and the judicious measures adopted by Government for the introduction of Indian corn produced so abundant a supply, that even in June following, always the most trying time in Ireland, the local authorities reported “that there is still abundance of provisions in the country; the markets, considering all things, are well supplied and reasonable; and the forethought and wise measures of Government with regard to the Indian meal are daily producing their desired effects. The coming crops look favourably, and promise more than an average harvest. A continuance of this system of relief for the next six weeks or two months will ward off the distress, famine, and destitution at one time so much apprehended.”¹ It is evident, therefore, that the apprehensions entertained of a general scarcity, even of potatoes, had been unfounded; and the crop of oats everywhere had been immense. This state of things was quite consistent with very great distress, loudly calling for Government interposition in particular places; but that was not because food, on the whole, was wanting, but because, the produce of their little possessions having failed, the people had no money to buy it.² The remedy for this was not a prospective and remote repeal of the Corn Laws, but an immediate impulse to the

¹ Colonel O'Donnell to the Military Secretary, Dublin, June 15, 1846; Peel's Mem. ii. 304.

² Peel's Memoirs, ii. 304, 306.

* “In eight years, from 1838 to 1846, the price of potatoes in Dublin markets has varied from 3s. to 4s. per cwt.; the average prices for eight years being 3s. 6½d. per cwt. The price at Christmas 1845 was 4s. the cwt., not quite 6d. the cwt. above the average price for the eight years from 1838. This is worthy of attention.”—DUKE OF WELLINGTON to SIR R. PEEL, Jan. 13, 1846; *Peel's Memoirs*, ii. 264.

wages of labour by Government employment, and when this was afforded, entire relief was experienced.*

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If, from the reasons of immediate necessity put forward in support of the repeal of the Corn Laws, we pass to the more durable reasons founded on the state of the public mind on the subject, and the strength of the monied and manufacturing interest in the House of Commons, we shall see much stronger reasons to consider it as a measure which could not be much longer delayed by any Government. In truth, the demand for it arose from the silent change of time; and the existence of that demand was an indication that the time had arrived when nature intended it should be granted. The very riches of Great Britain, which had grown up during a century and a half of protection, had raised the wages of labour so much in it, owing to the affluence of money from all quarters of the globe, that the manufacturers felt the necessity of some lasting reduction of wages, to enable them to compete with foreign artisans either in the foreign or the home market. The inhabitants of towns, whose gains had been seriously diminished by the monetary policy of Government, sighed for the comparatively cheap supplies of food enjoyed by the inhabitants of poorer foreign states. That very monetary policy, and the system of free trade introduced along with it, had been a part of the great design of *cheapening everything*, intended to obviate the effects of the accumulation of wealth in a particular State, and the final burdens with which such accumulation is invariably, after a time, attended. To these consuming classes, whose interests were directly adverse to those of the producing, the

1846.
89.
Durable
reasons for
the repeal of
the Corn
Laws.

* "In many places, in the interval between seed-time and hay-harvest, a more than ordinary distress is felt by the cottars, especially in remote districts. In many places the want has been already anticipated, and met by the management of relief committees in donations, and the employment of the poor at public works. Where such arrangements have been made, crime has decreased, and the relief and advantages to the poor have been incalculable."—Col. O'DONNELL to Military Secretary, Dublin, June 15, 1846; *Peel's Memoirs*, ii. 305.

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Reform Bill chiefly, by the destruction of the nomination boroughs, the seat of the latter's representation, had given a decided majority in the legislature. That very legislative preponderance was the result of the superior wealth, energy, and political organisation which had given them the victory in the Reform contest. The weight now acquired by the Anti-Corn-Law League was another instance of the same preponderance. Situated as he was in 1846, therefore, Sir R. Peel was right in his belief that the repeal of the Corn Laws ere long was unavoidable ; for nearly all his urban supporters, who constituted his majority, were enlisted on its side. Whether *he* should have done it, recollecting his former professions, and what interest he was placed in power to support, is a very different question, on which probably the opinion of posterity will be as unanimous on the other side.

90.
Real free-trade was not introduced, but protection taken from agriculture.

But be this as it may, one thing is perfectly clear, and that is, that it was anything but general free trade which Sir R. Peel introduced on this occasion ; it was, on the contrary, a *retention of protection to the manufacturer, and a withdrawal of it from the farmer*. Wheat, after February 1849, was to be admitted at the nominal duty of 1s. a quarter, which, supposing wheat on an average to be at 50s., was a *fiftieth* part. But the protection retained for manufactured goods at the same time was not a fiftieth, but from a *tenth to a fifteenth* part, which was equivalent to what from 5s. to 7s. 6d. would have been on wheat. This is a most important distinction, which, in the heat of the controversy, has been well-nigh forgotten by the Protectionists, and has been studiously kept out of view by the Free-traders. It was, however, forcibly brought under Sir R. Peel's notice by Mr Goulburn when the corn-law repeal was first brought before the Cabinet.* Comfortably sheltered under protection,

* "From the immense amount of our debt, and charges imposed on every interest in the country, in respect of it, every manufacturer in this country has in justice a claim to be protected, as regards the supply of the home consumer

the manufacturers beheld with satisfaction, and greeted with applause, a policy which, for their benefit, as they thought, took it away entirely from the agriculturist. One would have supposed, from this, that the latter class had facilities for production, and peculiar advantages in competition with foreign states, which the former did not enjoy; whereas the fact was just the reverse. There is no steam-engine in the fields; coal and iron, all-powerful in manufacturing, are comparatively impotent in rural labour. We have heard much of the English manufacturers underselling those of Hindostan in cotton goods, but no one ever heard of English farmers underselling those of Poland, Moldavia, or America, in the produce of the fields. The removal of protection from agriculture, therefore, and retention of it to manufactures, was not free trade; it was a simple act of injustice to the former of these interests. It does not by any means follow from this, that, situated as the country and constituted as the House of Commons was at this crisis, it was not a matter of necessity to adopt this policy. But it does

against the competition of a foreigner, who, not having the same charges upon him, is or ought to be able to supply articles at a cheaper rate. On this principle you give cotton and linen manufacturers a protection of from 10 to 20 per cent; and to this extent, and on the same ground, I see no reason why corn should not be protected. Nay, has not corn, on the same principle, a *strong title to extra protection*, on account of the mode in which both the raw material and the manufactured article are both subject to duty? It appears from the *Report on Local Taxation* (p. 27), that local rates amount, on the whole of England and Wales, to 2s. 8d. in the pound of all real property. But while 2s. 8d. is the general rate on real property of every description, including houses, it will be found that in agricultural districts the rate in the pound is much greater. On an average the rent of land is not above 20s. an acre; therefore 2s. 8d. on the raw material is 13 per cent. Relieve him from this charge, and freedom of import would be less important."—MR GOULBURN'S Memorandum to SIR R. PEEL, November 30, 1846; *Peel's Memoirs*, ii. 205. It is a curious circumstance, that while he saw so clearly, and has so well expressed, the peculiar reason for protection to British agriculture which arises from the peculiar fiscal burdens to which it is subjected, from which the manufacturers are exempted, he made no mention of the *far stronger* claims for protection, arising from the high money-wages of labour in Britain, owing to the riches of the country and affluence of money, and the impossibility of capital and machinery obviating this inequality in agricultural as it can so successfully do in manufacturing industry.

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follow, that we may rest assured that any interest in the country, which, though neither the greatest nor the most powerful, has got the command of the legislature, will force through measures which it deems for its own peculiar benefit, without the slightest regard to their effects upon the interests of the other classes of the community, or even, in the end, of their own.

91.
Strange conduct of the Irish members on the Corn Law question.

Another circumstance, which is worthy of particular notice in this great debate, is the part which the Irish popular and Roman Catholic members took regarding it. Being entirely an agricultural country, in which seven-eighths of the inhabitants, and nineteen-twentieths of the wealth, was obtained from rural labour, it is evident that its interests clearly were to support protection to agriculture. Manchester or Glasgow might have much to say on behalf of free trade in grain, because to them it promised to lessen the cost of living and of production; but what had Clare or Roscommon to say to it, whose produce was liable by it to be ruined by foreign competition? Accordingly, it stands proved by incontrovertible evidence, that within four years of the introduction of Free Trade, the produce of Ireland in wheat alone had declined by 1,500,000 quarters,* and that the grain of all kinds imported from that country into Great Britain had

* EXPORTS OF GRAIN FROM IRELAND.

Years.	Quarters—Of which, Wheat — Oats and Oatmeal.	Qrs	Qrs.
1845, . . .	3,251,901	779,113	2,353,985
1846, . . .	1,841,802	393,462	1,311,591
1847, . . .	963,779	184,222	703,462
1848, . . .	1,946,417	304,872	1,546,568
1849, . . .	1,426,397	233,445	1,122,067

—PORTER, p. 345.

From Captain Larcom's Report for 1849, it appears the production of wheat since 1845 had declined 1,500,000 quarters in Ireland. Since prices rose after 1852 there has been a corresponding increase. The potato famine had nothing to do with this decline in *cereal* crops, for they were not at all affected by the disease which was so fatal to the forner; and as prices rose from this cause, the only effect of the failure of the potato crops and general rise of prices, should have been a great increase of cereal crops, and in particular of wheat. And the harvest of 1847 was so fine that, at Lord John Russell's suggestion, a general thanksgiving was returned for it.

declined from 3,251,000 quarters to 1,426,397. Nothing is more certain, therefore, than that, whatever it was to England and Scotland, free trade in grain was ruinous to Ireland; and it will immediately appear that the prodigious emigration which has, since it was introduced, banished above 2,000,000 Irish from the Emerald Isle, has been mainly owing to the cutting off of this the best market for their produce. Yet the change, fraught with such disastrous effects to Ireland, which were thoroughly foreseen and predicted at the time, was supported by the whole Roman Catholic party in the House of Commons, themselves for the most part representing Irish *counties*. Not a whisper escaped their constituents; not a qualm of remorse came over themselves for such suicidal conduct. The names of Daniel O'Connell, his sons, and followers, are to be seen in the majority in all the corn-law discussions.* It belongs to the biographers or friends of the leaders of that party to justify, if they can, such extraordinary conduct, which was obviously dictated by hatred of England, not love of Ireland, and revealed too clearly a secret foreign influence. Observe, they supported the absolute and lasting repeal, not a temporary suspension to meet a temporary calamity. To the historian it affords a melancholy example of the truth, that representative institutions afford no security whatever for good government, unless the constituents, as well as the representatives, are animated by a patriotic spirit, and alive to the real interests of their country, and that, under other circumstances, or when influenced by a foreign or sacerdotal influence, it may become one of the greatest evils which can afflict society.

If the conduct of the followers in Ireland of the Free-trade party is calculated to excite surprise, that of the leaders of the Protectionist in Great Britain appears, at first sight, to be hardly less so. The Duke of Wellin-

* See in particular the divisions on the Corn Laws.—*Parl. Deb.* lxxxvi. 89, 721, and lxxxiv. 351.

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92.

The Duke
of Wellington's
characteristic
conduct.

ton was clearly and strongly opposed to the repeal of the Corn Laws, and was the leader of the party in the Cabinet which, by refusing to accede to it, obliged Sir R. Peel to resign in December 1845.* The Duke of Buccleuch was the same.† Yet both these noblemen shortly after resumed office after Lord Stanley had seceded from it, on the understanding that the entire repeal of the Corn Laws was to be made a Cabinet question; and the former said emphatically in the House of Peers, that he was delighted with the Premier's resuming office on these conditions, and that he should, in his place, have done just the same.‡ This conduct appears to be very inconsistent with previous and strongly expressed opinions; but it is easily explained if the leading feature in the Duke of Wellington's character is considered—that is, fidelity to his Sovereign in difficulty. This duty

* "I am one of those who think the continuance of the Corn Laws essential to the agriculture of the country in its existing state, and a benefit to the whole community.

"I am afraid that it would soon be found that this country would cease to be sought after as the desirable market of the world, if the interests of agriculture should be injured by a premature repeal of the Corn Laws. It appears to me, likewise, that this country is in a better situation than any other to bear the shock arising from the potato disease, and this even in Ireland. The evil in Ireland is not a deficiency of food for the year, or even of the particular description of food, potatoes, but the great and supposed general deficiency of that spread of food operating upon the social condition of Ireland, the habits of the great body of the people, who are producers of the food which they consume during three-fourths of the year in general, and who must consequently be in a state of destitution, and who have not the pecuniary, and if they had the pecuniary means, are not in the habit of purchasing their food in the market."—DUKE OF WELLINGTON'S Memorandum, Nov. 30. 1845; *Peel's Memoirs*, vol. ii. pp. 198, 199.

† "Lord Stanley and the Duke of Buccleuch, after anxious reflection, each declared his inability to support a measure involving the ultimate repeal of the Corn Laws."—*Peel's Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 221.

‡ "I was of opinion that the formation of a Government, in which her Majesty would have confidence, was of much greater importance than the opinions of any individual on the Corn Laws or on any other laws. My Lords, I received a letter from my right hon. friend, desiring me to attend a Cabinet Council that evening (Dec. 20), which I did. *I applauded the conduct of my right hon. friend: I was delighted with it.* It was exactly the course which I should have followed myself under similar circumstances, and therefore I determined, my Lords, to stand by him."—DUKE OF WELLINGTON'S *Speech*, Jan. 26, 1846; *Parl. Deb.*

the old soldier deemed paramount to every other ; and situated as the Queen was, after Lord Stanley had declared his inability to form a Cabinet on Protection principles, and Lord J. Russell had failed in making one of the Whigs, he held that he was bound to support her even at the hazard of his own consistency. He thought the support of Sir R. Peel's government of more importance than the maintenance of any consistency, the adherence to any preconceived opinions ; and he saw no way of doing this but by going into his views on the Corn Laws. The Duke of Buccleuch appears, in resuming office with Wellington, to have been actuated by the same views. We may lament that circumstances should have occurred which rendered such a deviation from principle unavoidable ; but every one must see that circumstances may occur when it is at once the duty of the patriot and the path of honour to do so.*

But though these circumstances, joined to peculiar habits and a military life, may vindicate the Duke of Wellington for his sudden conversion on this subject, no similar apology can be admitted for Sir R. Peel. *He created the necessity* to which the Duke of Wellington yielded. There was no earthly necessity for repealing the Corn Laws prospectively in January 1846, to take effect *three years after*, whatever there may have been to open the ports entirely by an Order in Council at the moment. The engrafting a permanent change of policy on a temporary calamity, was a gratuitous and uncalled-for measure on his part, which never should have been adopted but with the full concurrence of the party which had placed him in power. There was plenty of time to do so ; he had three

93.
This will
not apply to
Sir R. Peel.

* " My own judgment would lead me to support the Corn Laws. Sir R. Peel may think that his position in Parliament, and in the public view, requires that the course should be taken which he recommends, and if this should be the case, I earnestly recommend that the Cabinet should support him, and I for one declare that I will do so."—WELLINGTON'S Memorandum, Nov. 30, 1845; *Peel's Memoirs*, ii. 200.

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years to think of it and select his own opportunity for making the communication, and if not acquiesced in, resigning office without inconvenience to the Queen's service, and supporting Free Trade as a private individual. This is what the Duke of Wellington recommended.* Instead of doing this, he forced the whole question on at once ; evidently taking advantage of the panic of the moment, to drive through a change which in cooler moments he despaired of effecting. This was clearly wrong. The mere change of opinion was, in itself, no ways blamable ; often it is the highest indication of political sagacity, the last effort of political virtue. "*Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*" is sometimes the maxim of integrity not less than discrimination. But it is one thing to change opinions when the former appear to have been erroneous, or alter conduct when it has become expedient to do so ; it is another, and a very different thing, to betray a trust reposed by a party to whose support the acquisition of power has been owing. That is somewhat akin to what Marlborough did when he made use of the Guards, at whose head he had been placed by James, to establish William on the throne, or Ney when he left Paris to take the command of the royal army at Melun, promising to bring Napoleon back in an iron cage. Had he *resigned office, and then supported free-trade principles*, the Tories might have lamented his change of opinion, but they could not have assailed his honour. But no royal solicitation or state necessity will ever, in the eyes of posterity, vindicate a general who deserts his colours on the day of battle. The defection of Sir R. Peel from the principles of the party which placed him in power, while still retaining that power, is therefore a derelict-

* "I would recommend that in the Queen's Speech the Queen should recommend a reconsideration of the Corn Laws, with a view to a *suspension* of their provisions, if that measure should appear to be necessary ; and such alterations in regard to certain articles of food as may appear to be desirable, and may not be inconsistent with the principle and object of the laws."—DUKE OF WELLINGTON'S Memorandum, Nov. 30, 1845 ; *Peel's Memoirs*, ii. 201.

tion of duty which honour must ever lament, and will never imitate.*

But though justice must condemn Sir R. Peel's conduct in retaining office while he changed his principles, yet even here certain alleviating circumstances require to be taken into consideration. It was his fate to be called to direct the councils of his country at the critical time when its growth had terminated, when it had arrived at full maturity, and the causes of decline were beginning to operate. When the obstructing causes were to come into full play, was a mere question of time; no human power could permanently prevent their action any more than it could the silent change of summer into autumn. Sir R. Peel may have accelerated by a few years the adoption of free-trade principles by old and opulent England, but he did nothing more. Sooner or later they will always be embraced by a rich and aged community, in consequence of the action of the laws provided by nature to arrest the growth of aged communities. The

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94.

What were
the alleviat-
ing circum-
stances of
his case?

* The danger of the course on which he was adventuring was clearly explained to Sir R. Peel by Mr Goulburn. "The more," said he, "I reflect upon the observations which you made to me a few days since as to your difficulty in again defending a corn-law in Parliament, the more do I feel alarmed at the consequences of your taking a different course from that which you formerly adopted. An abandonment of your former opinions would, I think, now *prejudice your and our characters as public men*, and would be fraught with fatal results to the country's best interests; and as I probably hear many opinions on a subject of this kind which do not reach you, the view which I take of probable consequences may not be undeserving of your consideration. When the public feel, as I believe they do, great doubts as to the existence of an adequate necessity, when greater doubts still are entertained as to the applicability of an abandonment of the corn-law as a remedy for our present distress, the people will, I fear, tax us with treachery and deception, and charge us from our former language with having always had it in contemplation. I view with still greater alarm the effects of the proposed change upon the public interests. In my opinion, the party of which you are the head is the only barrier against the revolutionary effects of the Reform Bill. So long as that party remains unbroken, whether in or out of power, it has the means of doing much good, at least of preventing much evil. But if it be broken in pieces by a destruction of confidence in its leaders (and I cannot but think a destruction of the Corn Laws would produce that result), I see nothing before us but the exasperation of class animosities, a struggle for pre-eminence, and the ultimate triumph of unrestrained democracy."—MR GOULBURN to SIR R. PEEL, Nov. 30, 1845; *Peel's Memoirs*, ii. 201, 203.

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cry, "*Panem et Circenses*" has been heard in other realms than those of Imperial Rome ; it is at bottom the same cry as that of cheap bread which convulsed Great Britain in these times. And without altogether exculpating the statesmen who were instrumental in giving to that cry the command of the State, it is but justice to them to recollect that the change, at least at no distant period, had been rendered necessary by general causes, and that its adoption was one of the great means provided by Nature for checking the growth of worn-out communities, and securing the extension and dispersion of mankind.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ENGLAND, FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF FREE TRADE AND
FALL OF SIR R. PEEL IN JUNE 1846, TO THE SUPPRESSION
OF THE CHARTIST INSURRECTION IN APRIL 1848.

THUS was Free Trade introduced, and the great Tory party split asunder by the act of its Protectionist chief! The effects of this change of policy and dislocation of parties have been great and decisive, and extended far beyond the lifetime or sphere of the persons who were instrumental in bringing it about. It has diffused, for a very long period, perhaps for ever, in Great Britain, a distrust in public men—a disbelief either in fixity of policy, or adherence to principle, in the rulers of the State. It has spread abroad the conviction that the ruling power in the commonwealth is no longer to be found in its aristocracy, either of rank, property, talents, or virtues; but that by a well-concerted and vigorous system of popular agitation, the whole of these influences may be overthrown, and Government become impracticable, except by the abandonment of pledges the most solemnly given, principles the most solemnly asserted, and concession to demands attended with the most obvious danger. It has entirely broken up and divided the great Tory party, which for half a century had ruled the empire, and withstood, both in arms and influence, the first French Revolution. It has introduced into that once firm and united body discord the most incurable, heart-burnings the most violent.

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1.
Vast effects
of the intro-
duction of
Free Trade.

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Words were spoken on both sides which can never be forgiven; deeds done which can never be forgotten. When eighty Protectionists, the representatives of the old English aristocracy, followed Lord George Bentinck and Mr Disraeli into the hostile lobby on the division on the Irish Coercion Bill, the knell of the Tory party was rung, the rule of steady consistent party on either side came to an end, and the empire was handed over to successive coalitions of discordant interests, involving on all sides dereliction of principle, attended to none by durability of power.

2.
Both the
Whigs and
the Tories
were de-
stroyed by
their own
leaders.

It is remarkable that the breaking up of the two great parties which have alternately ruled the State ever since the Revolution was in neither case owing to the hostility of its opponent, however ably directed or perseveringly applied. It was neither Mr Pitt nor Lord Castlereagh that overturned the Whigs; it was not Mr Fox or Mr Burke that paralysed the Tories. From the assaults of those great men, strongly supported as they were, their opponents on both sides entirely recovered, and they never were so powerful as after those periods when the strife had been most violent. Witness Mr Pitt in 1784, after the desperate struggle with the Coalition; Earl Grey in 1832, after the close of the long-continued strife consequent on the French Revolution. Even the Reform Bill, however skilfully directed to that end, did not destroy the Tory party; the Opposition was never so united or so ably led as from 1835 to 1841 when guided by Sir R. Peel, the Government never so powerful as when he came into power in the close of the latter year. The Whigs as a party were destroyed by the Reform Bill, forced through the Lords by their powerful leaders at the head of the whole democracy of the empire; the Tories as a party were destroyed by Sir R. Peel, when at the head of the Government, and supported by a majority so large as promised them a lease of power for an unlimited period. Earl Grey's triumph terminated the ascendancy of the old Whig

families which had so long ruled the State, and substituted in its room that of a coalition of English urban Liberals, Scotch Radicals, and Irish Catholics ; Sir R. Peel's return to power with a majority of 91 was the herald of the dissolution of the great and united party which he had so long and ably headed, and its severance into angry, soured Protectionists, too weak to form a government, and wavering Liberal Conservatives, eminent in talent, but without followers sufficient to give them any pretensions to be a ruling party.

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Without doubt this strange and anomalous result is to be ascribed in some degree to the pressure of external circumstances. The growing wealth and importance of the commercial portion of the nation called for an enlarged admission of their representatives into the legislature, as it did for a certain modification of the duties on the admission of food and necessary articles of subsistence. So far, a concession was necessary in both cases. But the amount and measure of the concession were in both voluntary, and the authors of the changes are responsible for their effects. Both were precipitated, and rendered unavoidable, by the previous acts of the very Ministers who introduced them ; both were forced on by the power which they respectively wielded, in utter ignorance of their effects. The Reform Bill was first rendered a national object of desire from the effect of the long-continued declamations of the Whigs and Liberals at the former representation of interests and classes ; and it was rendered so broad and sweeping, from Earl Grey seriously and in good faith anticipating from it effects diametrically the reverse of those with which it was actually attended. The demand for the repeal of the Corn Laws was mainly owing to the monetary system which had been in operation for a quarter of a century, which, by halving the remuneration for every species of industry, had swelled into a passion the desire for a corresponding reduction in the price of food ; and to the conduct of Sir R. Peel himself, who, by applying the

3.
Causes
which led
to these
changes.

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principles of Free Trade to inferior articles, rendered irresistible the cry for its extension to the principal staples of human consumption. Not less than the great alteration in the structure of the constitution, this social change was forced through by him in direct opposition to the wishes of his party and his own former professions, and in such complete ignorance of its effects, that, before many years had elapsed, it had induced evils of a far more serious and irremediable kind than those it was intended to remove. The commencement of these evils forms the interesting and instructive subject of the present chapter.

4.
Formation
of the new
Cabinet.

As a matter of course, the Queen, upon the resignation of Sir R. Peel, for whom she had conceived the highest esteem, sent for Lord John Russell, and he experienced much less difficulty in forming a Cabinet than on the last similar occasion Lord Melbourne had done.* Lord John

* THE WHIG GOVERNMENT, AS NOW REARRANGED.

Cabinet.

First Lord of the Treasury,	Lord J. Russell.
Lord-Chancellor,	Lord Cottenham.
President of the Council,	Marquis of Londonderry.
Lord Privy Seal,	Earl of Minto.
Home Office,	Sir G. Grey.
Foreign Office,	Viscount Palmerston.
Colonial Office,	Earl Grey.
Chancellor of the Exchequer,	Sir C. Wood.
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster,	Lord Campbell.
Paymaster-General,	Mr Macaulay.
Woods and Forests,	Lord Morpeth.
Postmaster-General,	Lord Clanricarde.
Board of Trade,	Earl of Clarendon.
Board of Control,	Sir J. Hobhouse.
Secretary for Ireland,	Mr Labouchere.
First Lord of the Admiralty,	Earl of Auckland.

Not in the Cabinet.

Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland,	Earl of Besborough.
Secretary at War,	Fox Maule, Esq.
Commander-in-Chief,	Duke of Wellington.
Master-General of the Ordnance,	Marquess of Anglesea.
Master of the Mint,	R. L. Shiel, Esq.
Attorney-General,	Sir J. Jervis.
Solicitor-General,	Sir D. Dundas.
Lord-Advocate of Scotland,	And. Rutherford, Esq.
Solicitor-General,	Thos. Maitland, Esq.

—*Parl. Deb.* lxxxvii. 1.

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Russell was First Lord of the Treasury ; Lord Cottenham became Lord-Chancellor ; Sir George Grey, Home, and Lord Palmerston, Foreign, Secretary ; with whom Earl Grey was now persuaded to act as Secretary for the Colonies. Sir C. Wood was Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Auckland First Lord of the Admiralty. The Cabinet consisted of the unusually large number of sixteen, and certainly presented a brilliant display of oratorical and parliamentary talent, though the great preponderance of noblemen gave little promise of a due infusion of business habits, and the paucity of practical men afforded too good reason to fear a serious deficiency in knowledge of the real situation and wants of the country. So completely, however, was the Tory party understood to be split asunder by the dissensions consequent on Free Trade, that the eyes of the entire nation were turned to the new Cabinet, as the only one possible under existing circumstances ; and the elections consequent on the vacating of ¹ Ann. Reg. 1846, 102 ; seats from the formation of the new Government excited ² Parl. Deb. lxxxvii. 1, 4. very little attention. All the members of the new Government were returned almost without opposition.¹

Parliament met again after a short adjournment, during which the returns for the vacated seats took place on the 16th July ; and the first subject of importance which came on for discussion was the sugar-duties, which required immediate attention, as the bill for the existing duties expired on the 4th August. Lord John Russell brought forward this important subject in a very able speech ; and the plan which he proposed, and which received the sanction of a large majority of the House of Commons, is the more worthy of attention, as it afforded the first instance of the effect of the free-trade measure, then so much in vogue, and so largely adopted by Parliament, upon the *producing* interests of the empire. "The first question," said his lordship, "is, what is the consumption in average years of the empire ? and the next, is there any chance of supply within ourselves adequate

5.
Govern-
ment plan
for the
sugar-
duties.
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to meet it ? The returns of sugar imported on an average of the last three years, and the concurring opinion of all practical men engaged in the trade, fix the annual consumption at 252,000 tons ; while the most probable view of the supply does not give above 230,000 tons.* Then, where is the additional supply of 22,000 tons, of an article now become one of the necessities of life to a large part of our people, to come from ? There is no resource we can look to but foreign slave-grown sugar. That sugar has been virtually excluded from the market since the final emancipation of the slaves in 1837, a period now of nine years, and all the efforts of the producers of sugar in our own colonies have been unable to keep pace with the demand, or prevent the price of the article rising, as it is now doing, to what, as to it, amounts to a famine level. There is an absolute necessity, therefore, of recurring to the Slave States for a supply of this necessary article of consumption. Indeed, the exclusion of slave-grown sugar, under the present prohibitory system, is impracticable, for the Slave States are in possession of treaties under which they are entitled to demand the admission of their slave-grown sugar 'on the same terms as' the most favoured nation. Under the present system the discouragement to slavery in the Slave States is more apparent than real, because the slave growers find a market for their produce in other countries into which it obtains free admission, whence they receive supplies in return which come

* CALCULATION OF THE WEST INDIA BODY FOR 1847.

	Tons.
West Indies,	125,000
Mauritius,	50,000
East Indies,	75,000
	<hr/> 250,000
That of the sugar refiners was less favourable,—	
West Indies,	115,000
Mauritius,	40,000
East Indies,	70,000
	<hr/> 225,000

from Great Britain, so that there is a virtual exchange of English manufactures for foreign slave sugar. The Spanish slave planters might just as well send their sugar direct to this country in exchange for our manufactures, as do so by means of this intervening transaction.

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“The argument, so strongly rested on by the Protectionists—that if you admit foreign slave sugar on any-
thing like an equality with British free grown, you give an encouragement to slavery, and go back upon all your own enactments for the emancipation of the negroes—though specious in appearance, has no solid foundation. No such bar as is contended for in the case of sugar is imposed upon slave produce in other articles, as cotton, tobacco, copper, and many others. Nobody can deny that the vast consumption of these articles, especially the two first, in this country, gives an impulse to slavery in the United States ; but has any one yet been bold enough to affirm, that before admitting the American cotton into our harbours, we must insist on their solving the tremendous problem hanging over their heads in the United States, and emancipating all the negroes by whose hands the cotton has been raised ? Such a proposal would be little short of insanity ; and yet if there is any foundation for the argument that we should keep up the heavy import-duties on foreign slave-grown sugar to discourage slavery, we unquestionably, to be consistent, should apply the same principle to American slave-grown cotton.

6.
Continued.

*

“Financial considerations of the very highest moment concur with the obvious expedience of the thing itself in recommending the introduction of foreign slave sugars at moderate import-duties. If we deduct the £700,000 of China money, which is not a permanent source of income, from the estimated revenue for 1847-48, there will be a deficiency of £352,000, with the chance of its being increased to half a million in that year. This follows from the late Chancellor of the Exchequer’s own statement. Now this being in the most favourable view the state of

7.
Continued.

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our finances, is it not expedient to adopt a measure which will fill up the gap, not only without adding to the burdens of the people, but actually diminishing, in a sensible degree, to them the cost of a general and necessary article of human subsistence ?

8.
Concluded.

“The plan which Government proposes is this : Instead of the present prohibitory duty of 63s. the cwt. on foreign slave muscovado sugar, and 23s. 4d. on foreign free-labour sugar, there shall be imposed for the present year a duty of 21s. on all foreign sugar, whether the produce of free or slave labour, the duty to fall progressively till July 1851, when it should be permanently fixed at 14s.* In addition to this, the differential duty between rum and British spirits is to be reduced from 1s. 6d. to 1s. the gallon. We cannot accede to the demand of the West Indians that molasses should be admitted to our breweries and distilleries. In consideration of these reductions, which will go far to lower the price of sugar to the British consumer, we propose to relax in some degree the restrictions at present in force on the importation of free black immigrants from Africa into the West Indies. By the Orders in Council, originally in force after the suppression of slavery, the emigration of negroes from Sierra Leone to the West Indies was absolutely prohibited, from an apprehension that, if allowed, it would prove the slave trade in disguise. This prohibition was subsequently relaxed, both by Lord Melbourne’s government and that of Sir R. Peel, both in regard to Africa and other parts of the world, from a sense of its necessity. Still, however, the law is, that any agreement or contract for the services

* PROPOSED RATE OF DECLINE OF THE DUTY ON FOREIGN SUGAR.

To July 5, 1847,	. . . . .	21s.
„ 1848,	. . . . .	20s.
„ 1849,	. . . . .	18s. 6d.
„ 1850,	. . . . .	17s.
„ 1851,	. . . . .	15s. 6d.
After July 1851,	. . . . .	14s.

—*Parl. Deb.* lxxxvii. 1316, 1317.

of any negro, made in the British settlements in Africa, is not valid or binding in the West Indies, and is not to be respected by the British cruisers. We propose by the present act so far to modify this as to allow contracts for hiring of negroes in the *British* possessions on the coast of Africa to be binding in the West Indies, provided they are not for *more than a year*; but we do not deem it safe to permit any similar concession as to contracts made elsewhere on the African shores, or especially on the Kroo coast. Under this plan we shall realise from the sugar duties a revenue of £4,200,000, being £625,000 more than was expected by Sir R. Peel's proposed scale of duties, and in addition obtain the great advantage of giving the people of this country an increased supply of sugar at a reduced price."¹

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¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxxvi.
1304, 1318;
Ann. Reg.
1846, 166,
169, 170.

On the other hand it was argued by Lord George Bentinck, Mr Disraeli, and Lord Brougham: "It cannot now be denied, that, contrary to what was strenuously maintained when the emancipation of the negroes took place, the effect of that measure has been seriously to lessen the production of sugar in the West Indies. For while the average production of sugar in the British colonies in the West Indies was, on an average of six years before that event, 195,000 tons, their production since emancipation has fallen off to such a degree, that at one period it did not exceed 107,000 tons, and has in no instance exceeded 145,000 tons. As a natural consequence of this great decline, prices of that article have risen; on an average of twelve years, since emancipation, the rise has been no less than 10s. a hundredweight, or a penny a pound—from 27s. a cwt. to 37s. There can be no doubt that, in this state of affairs, the admission of slave-grown sugar would, in the first instance, reduce its price; possibly bring it down again to 27s. a cwt. But at what price would this advantage be gained, even in the light only of our own pecuniary interests? It could only be effected by

9.
Argument
of the Pro-
tectionists
on the other
side.

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lessening still further the production of sugar in our own dominions, and rendering us daily more and more dependent on the foreign slave growers for the supply of what has now become a necessary article of the national subsistence. Is that a desirable state of things? is it creditable to a great nation? And supposing the policy to be carried out to its uttermost length, and our own free-labour sugar to be entirely driven out of the market by the foreign slave-grown, what will be the result so far as prices and our own interests are concerned? Why, that we shall be entirely at the mercy of the foreign slave growers, and that the planters of Cuba and Brazil, having got the monopoly of the article into their own hands, will raise the price to any height which they please.

10.
Continued.

“Much is said of the inability of the colonies of Great Britain, working with free labour only, to supply the demand of this country, without a large assistance from foreign slave states. The statement is much exaggerated, and the difficulty, such as it is, has been mainly of our own creation. It is the restrictions imposed on the importation of free labourers into the West Indies, whether from Africa or China, by our own Orders in Council, which have been the main cause of the great decline of West Indian produce since the emancipation. Remove those most absurd and impolitic restrictions, and the production in the West Indies will increase. It is said by the Government that 125,000 tons may this year be expected from the West Indies, and an equal amount may be expected with confidence from the East Indies and the Mauritius. In fact, no limit can be assigned to the capabilities of production of sugar in the East Indies, *with a fine climate, ample means of irrigation*, and an hundred millions of people to cultivate it. Already in the Mauritius the crop this year has been 60,000 tons, of which 49,000 has been already shipped, or is in the course of being so. And the noble lord opposite calculates on 100,000 tons from India. These sources of

supply will, together, reach 285,000 tons,—considerably more than the annual requirements of this country, which, even during the last two years of unexampled prosperity and impulse to labour, has never exceeded 246,000 tons. Where, then, is the necessity of making a sacrifice of the present and future interests of our own free colonies, when we possess, within ourselves, the means of amply supplying all our necessities?

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“Look to our export trade to our colonies, as compared with that which we carry on with those countries from which we may expect to obtain sugar, and see whether we ourselves are likely to be gainers by exchanging the one with the other. The declared value of our exports to the West Indies was £2,500,000, when the population was 1,000,000, being 57s. a-head of our manufactures, whereas, to the United States, with a population of 15,000,000, it was only £7,500,000, being 10s. a-head. Is it not, then, for our interest to preserve our West Indian customers, who, if they send us their sugar, take our manufactures in return, rather than seek to ingratiate foreign nations, who require so much less of our manufactures, and add so little to our exports? If we get our sugar from Cuba or Brazil, the principal articles which they will take in exchange will be, not manufactures, but gold coin or bullion, the export of which will be attended with no other effect but a drain upon the metallic treasures of the Bank of England, and consequent contraction of the currency, and diminution of credit in this country. And as to the East Indies, the principal difficulty in regard to those possessions is, that their markets are already glutted with our manufactures; and if we in addition adopt measures which will deprive them of a market for the 100,000 tons of sugar which they now raise, what other result is to be anticipated but that their means of purchasing our manufactures will be still further lessened, and our trade with them will run more and more into a large balance of imports over exports, attended

11.
Continued.

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12.
Continued.

with a ruinous drain upon the metallic resources of this country ?

“If slave sugar is admitted, and the price of that article is in consequence diminished 6s. per cwt., somebody must be a loser if the consumers in this country are gainers. This difference of price will go into the pockets of the Cuba or Brazilian slave planter, or it will be taken from those of the British West India colonists and those engaged in the commerce of their productions. Was such a loss as this ever voluntarily inflicted by a legislature on one portion of its subjects ? It is boasted on the other side, that if this bill passes, it will save the British consumers from £1,500,000 to £2,000,000 a-year. Be it so. That sum is violently wrested from the West India planters, already labouring under the accumulated difficulties arising from the emancipation of the negroes, and who had adventured the last wreck of their fortunes in the attempt to stay the ruin, on the assurance that the Legislature would never so far recede in its career as to restore slavery and the slave trade, after having made such efforts for its suppression. If this bill passes, many of the most respectable merchants in that once wealthy trade will, before many weeks are over, be in the Gazette, and these splendid islands, once the pride and glory of England, will become a wilderness, inhabited only by savage and wild beasts.

13.
Continued.

“Is the country prepared to violate all its resolutions, abandon all its endeavours, contradict all its professions, render itself contemptible in the eyes of men, guilty in the sight of Heaven, by restoring the slave trade after having made such efforts for its abolition ? Mr O’Connell has put the matter plainly and forcibly. ‘The question is cheap sugar with slavery, or dearer sugar without it. It is nothing else than the repetition of the children’s fable—the large loaf or the father’s curse. It is *a farce to let in the sugars of Cuba and Brazil, and at the same time to propose or continue emancipation.*’ No

one regrets the twenty millions paid as the price of emancipation ; no one grudges the forty-nine vessels of war, 7000 men and 700 guns, now employed in repressing that infernal traffic. But what excuse can we make for ourselves, what a figure will we make in the eyes of the world, if at the very time when we are paying £1,500,000 as the interest of the loan borrowed, and the expense of these armaments, we are making a present of a similar or larger sum to the slave growers of Cuba and Brazil, and that too at the expense of our own fellow-countrymen in the West Indies, who have struggled on in opposition to overwhelming difficulties, in reliance on our philanthropic professions ? The profits which the slave-owners will make of this measure are immense. If the price of sugar is raised by it to them £6 a ton, and each negro make three tons a-year, the annual value of the slave labour is increased £18. Supposing he lasts ten years, there is £180 added to the value of the slave, which at present is £81 ! What a fearful encouragement are we about to give to the accursed traffic which we professed ourselves so desirous to abolish !

“ It has often been said, but it cannot be too often repeated, that the slave trade which the bill now under consideration goes to strengthen and restore, is a species of that infernal traffic far worse, as well as more extensive, than that of which Mr Wilberforce effected the abolition forty years ago. Imagination cannot conceive, the pen almost refuses to record, the lips can scarcely be brought to utter, the horrors of this awful traffic as it is now proposed to be re-established. Six years ago Mr Fowell Buxton said in this house, that such had been the impulse given to the slave trade by the emancipation of the negroes that 250,000 negroes annually passed the Atlantic ; and Lord Aberdeen said, in 1844, that the average number of slaves annually imported into the Southern States of North America and the Spanish West Indies alone, was 100,000 a-year. This year above 16,000 were imported into Rio

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14.
Continued.

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Janeiro alone. Is it to a trade of such gigantic dimensions, so much exceeding what our own slave trade was in its worst days, that you are prepared to give the immense additional impulse arising from the present measure, which will at once more than double the value of every imported slave? But melancholy as the vast increase of the slave trade, from the effect of our measures, has been, it is as nothing compared to the augmented horrors of the traffic, which, in the hands of the Spaniards and Portuguese, have now reached a pitch never before equalled, and which apparently it is impossible to exceed. By the Passenger Act in Great Britain, which regulated the slave trade while it was legal, five tons were allowed for each slave; but as it is now practised, *there are five or six slaves to one ton*. The slave-deck is 2 feet 10 inches high; and, in one instance, 349 human beings were embarked on board a vessel 67 feet long by 21 broad, with a measure of from 80 to 100 tons. Such are the sufferings of the poor wretches crammed into these holes, where they are for days and weeks enduring the agonies of suffocation, that they are sometimes driven by the madness induced by suffering into revolt; but in such cases the arms and discipline of the Europeans generally prevail, and after forty or fifty have been massacred, the rest are flogged in so merciless a manner that death would be a relief to their prolonged sufferings.*

“Let us not deceive ourselves, therefore: we are about to pass a measure which will restore the slave trade in

* “Those who were thus executed were heavily ironed; a rope was then put round their necks, which was rove through the yard-arm, and they were run up from the deck. By this means they were not hanged, they were strangled or choked, and in that state, while still alive, they were shot in the breast, and then thrown overboard. If there were two shot or hanged together, *they were run up in the same manner, until their legs were laid across the rail of the bulwark on the ship's side, and then they were broken, and chopped off to save the irons*. In this way the bleeding body of a negro was thrown overboard to make way for another. The legs of about a dozen were chopped off in that manner. When the bleeding feet fell on the deck, they were picked up by the Brazilian crew, and then thrown overboard after the body; sometimes they pelted the body with them in sport while it hung half alive. When

far more than its pristine horrors. When on the verge of sealing it up by our powerful navy on the coast of Africa, we shall reopen it in a new legitimised channel, and in a form which will set at nought all the vigilance of our cruisers. Already France is cordially co-operating with us for the extinction of this infernal traffic, and even in Cuba and Brazil themselves a better feeling has arisen. Yet at this very moment, with the goal almost in view, we abandon the race, relinquish the good fight, and restore the trade in augmented strength and aggravated horrors. This bill will render nugatory all our former exertions for the abolition of the slave trade. The 150,000 negroes now annually imported from Africa will be fearfully augmented by the bounty we are preparing to give for their introduction. Free labour in our own colonies can never compete with slave labour, unless the slave-market of Africa is closed; and by the profits with which this measure will cause the slave trade to be attended, it will be reopened with more effect than ever. Eighty thousand human beings, the half of those imported, will be hurried by it, amidst excruciating tortures, into eternity! And this, in the year 1846, is the first act of a Liberal Government, and the earnest of the measures they are prepared to adopt in the service of humanity!"¹

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15.

Concluded.

Sir R. Peel pursued a very singular but eminently characteristic course on this occasion. He stated that the bill before the house was widely different from what he intended to have introduced, and that he thought the West Indies was an exceptional case to the general

¹ Parl. Deb.
lxxxviii.
34, 54; Ann.
Reg. 1846,
173, 191.

16.
Sir R. Peel's
singular
conduct,
and pass-
ing of the
bill.

two, chained together, were to be hung, they were shot while they remained suspended, and then thrown overboard while still alive. The women were shot in the neck, and thrown over while still living. Several of them were seen to struggle in the water for some time before they sunk. After this slaughter was done, about twenty were brought up and flogged. The women were flogged as well as the men. Such was the severity of the flogging they received that they were obliged to lie on their bellies during the remainder of the voyage; and on the backs of some the flesh had putrified and fallen off in pieces of six or eight inches in diameter."—*Account of the Treatment of the Slaves on board Lenordi Fonseca's Ship*, quoted by Lord G. Bentinck in *Parl. Deb.* lxxxviii. 49, 50.

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principles of free trade. Situated as he was, however, he declared his intention to support the bill, not because he approved of it, for he agreed with all Lord George Bentinck had said on the abomination of the traffic in slaves, and thought the reduction of duties on foreign slave sugar should be much more gradual, but simply because, if the bill were thrown out, which might "easily be done," "the Ministry would resign, and the country would have three Ministries within three weeks, and the new Ministry would revoke the measure regarding the Corn Laws which had been just passed." Then he declared that the abandonment of Protection in the British Islands compelled him to surrender it in the West Indies also. The result was, that Sir R. Peel, and all the Liberal Conservatives, as they began to be called, voted with the Ministry, and the bill was carried by a majority of 130, the numbers being 265 to 135. This was probably a tolerably accurate index of the strength of the purely Protectionist party, as compared with the united Whigs, and Liberal or urban Conservatives.

Parl. Deb.
xxxviii.
179, 182;
Ann. Reg.
1846, 185,
192.

In the House of Lords the majority was only 18, but that was in a very thin House of 28 members only. Every one saw that the battle of native industry had been fought and lost, and that, for good or for evil, free trade, in every department, was to be the destiny of the State.¹

17.
Result of
this mea-
sure to the
West In-
dies.

Thus was protection finally taken from the West Indies, and the principle of free trade carried out, even in that quarter, where its advocates admitted its application was most open to exception. Thus, also, it may now be confidently stated, were the WEST INDIES FINALLY RUINED. This is now proved by the decisive evidence of facts. For some years after the bill was passed, and before the rapidly declining rate of import duty on foreign slave sugar, the planters made immense efforts, hoping, as is often the case, to be able to compensate the reduction of price by increase of production; and though the returns exhibited a falling off in the principal articles of production, it was not so considerable as

might have been expected;* yet they exhibited in the next three years a falling off in sugar to the extent of 360,000 cwt. ; in rum, of 900,000 gallons ; and in coffee, of 3,200,000 pounds ! On the other hand, the foreign sugar imported since the bill came into operation has been immense ; from Cuba it has more than tripled ; from Brazil more than doubled.† But at length the resources of the colonies were worn out—the unequal struggle terminated. After having exhausted their credit and mortgaged their estates to the utmost they would bear, they could continue the conflict no longer. Vast estates in all the islands were abandoned, and speedily covered by jungle, in the midst of which the negroes squatted, and clearing little bits of ground adequate for their own maintenance, resumed the indolent, listless life of their fathers in Africa ; while the foreign sugar imported has increased so astonishingly, since the lowest point of the duties was reached in 1851, that IN THE THREE SUBSEQUENT YEARS IT HAD TRIPLED. An hundred millions of British property had been destroyed from the effect of these disastrous changes ; a great and growing market for our

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* IMPORTED FROM WEST INDIES.

Years.	Sugar, cwt.	Molasses, cwt.	Rum, gallons.	Coffee, lb.	Cocoa, lb.	Pimento, lb.
1847	3,199,814	531,171	5,259,449	6,763,163	3,028,881	1,358,560
1848	2,794,987	385,484	5,653,840	5,075,128	2,602,309	2,326,576
1849	2,840,531	605,628	4,329,640	3,590,839	3,159,086	2,273,956

PORTER, p. 803.

† SUGAR IMPORTED FROM CUBA, PORTO RICO, AND BRAZIL INTO THE UNITED KINGDOM.

Years.	Cuba and Porto Rico. Cwt.	Years.	Brazil. Cwt.
1845,	348,529	1845,	325,359
1846,	609,670	1846,	302,067
1847,	1,157,299	1847,	701,693

Sugar exported from Cuba and Brazil.

Years.	Cuba. Tons.	Years.	Brazil. Tons.
1840,	145,000	1846,	66,276
1850,	270,000	1849,	99,629

Returns, May 3, 1862.

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18.
Effect on
the slave
trade.

manufactures, and nursery for our shipping, reduced to little more than half of its former amount.*

Disastrous as these effects have been to the interests of Great Britain in the West Indies, they have been light in comparison of the immense impulse thereby given to the foreign slave-trade. Mr Fowell Buxton computed the number of Africans annually consumed by the foreign slave-trade in 1841 at 250,000; and Lord Aberdeen admitted that the slaves imported into Cuba and the Southern States of North America in that year were 100,000! What, then, must have been the magnitude of this infernal traffic, when, in consequence of

* BRITISH AND FOREIGN SUGAR IMPORTED INTO GREAT BRITAIN IN
FIRST NINE MONTHS OF 1852, 1853, AND 1854.

Years.	British. Cwt.	Years.	Foreign. Cwt.
1852, . .	2,944,186	1852, . .	877,404
1853, . .	2,413,943	1853, . .	1,547,406
1854, . .	2,584,735	1854, . .	2,560,554

—*Parl. Returns*, 1856.

The exports of British produce and manufactures to the West Indies, since the lowering of the duties, have undergone a great diminution—viz.

Years.	Years.
1846, . . £3,253,420	1851, . . £2,433,665
1847, . . 2,102,577	1852, . . 2,031,358
1848, . . 1,434,477	1853, . . 1,906,639
1849, . . 1,821,146	1854, . . 2,008,380